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**WHAT'S COOKING IN WASHINGTON? INTEREST GROUP LOBBYING AND
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2017

Dedication

For Justin and Everett.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the many individuals who, both professionally and personally, made this dissertation possible. Considerable credit goes to my dissertation advisor, Bartholomew Sparrow, who spent countless hours reading my work and providing detailed advice, as well as to my committee members, Bryan Jones, Brian Roberts, Sean Theriault, and John Mark Hansen. These men provided guidance, constructive feedback, and advice on academic research.

I also benefited greatly from my experience working for the Irma Rangel Public Policy Institute, under the mentorship of David Leal. PPI provided the financial support necessary for this dissertation and for other research. And the conversations with Dr. David Leal, Rachel Navarre, Alvaro Corral, Jon Lewallen, and Joe Tafoya, among others, improved the rigor of my thinking and exposed me to research outside of my chosen specialty.

Many others at the University of Texas also provided me with invaluable advice, mentorship and support. Dr. Bethany Albertson, Michelle Whyman, and Kristie Kelly, in particular deserve credit. Without their support I would have found graduate school a much less hospitable environment. I would like to end the acknowledgements of my academic support by thanking my alma mater, Southwestern University, and the political science faculty there. Southwestern taught me to love learning, embrace challenge, and to take criticism as an opportunity to improve rather than an invitation to quit.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement during my many years in graduate school. I owe the most gratitude to my husband, Justin Tounge, who provided me with unwavering encouragement, laughter,

perspective, and support. I also want to say thank you to my family, who have always encouraged me to ask questions and be stubborn, and to my friends, who persistently remained friends throughout my time in graduate school. I also want to specifically thank my mother, Marilyn Brock, who provided loving childcare so that I could finish my dissertation. And last, but not least, I want to say thank you to my son, Everett, who has made my life and my work more meaningful than I could have foreseen.

WHAT'S COOKING IN WASHINGTON? INTEREST GROUP LOBBYING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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This dissertation examines the strategies lobbyists use to influence public policy in the agriculture and food policy arena. Previous studies of lobbying have produced conflicting evidence for the impact of lobbying on the content of federal laws and regulations, despite the fact that, in the domain of agriculture alone, interest groups spent over \$133,786,278 to lobby the federal government in 2015. Such an investment demonstrates that interest groups are confident that their lobbying strategies produce tangible benefits for the industries and interests they represent. I argue that an organization's material resources, social connections, and prior experience lobbying in Washington determine the strategies they use to achieve their policy goals, and that Congressional polarization is increasing the power of interest group influence. Using an original dataset, based on hand-coded lobbying disclosure reports, and interviews with policy experts and lobbyists, I find clear and compelling evidence that lobbyists strategically direct their lobbying efforts to different government venues, depending on the nature of their relationship with members of Congress and members of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, interest groups with the greatest material resources are not

only more likely to lobby, but they are also more effective in their use of these resources to leverage their relationships with members of Congress for more efficient lobbying efforts. This dissertation is the first work of its kind to uncover the latent reasons driving lobbyists to utilize distinct strategies from one another in a policy arena crucial to American public health, environmental conservation, and national security.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Significance.....	3
What do we Know and How do we Study Lobbying: a Brief Summary	7
The Puzzle and the Argument	15
Research Design, in Brief	17
Plan of the Dissertation	18
Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theory.....	21
Political Environment, Subsystems, and Interest Groups	22
Political Capacity, Lobbying Effectiveness	28
Political Time, Institutions, and Interest Groups	33
Why Do We Care?	35
Chapter 3 The Business (as usual) of Washington: Political and Institutional Influences on Corporate Lobbying Strategy	37
Lobbying Strategy: What They Do, and When They Do It	39
Lobbying Strategy: Advancing the Theory.....	41
The Data.....	44
Methods.....	46
Results.....	54
Discussion and Conclusions	62
Chapter 4 Polarization and Congressional Lobbying	65
Polarization in Politics	66
Polarization Drives Lobbying	69
The Data.....	72
Methods.....	74
Results.....	80

Discussion and Conclusions	83
Chapter 5 He Said, She Said: The Power of Interest Group Negotiations	86
Path Dependence, Disruption, and Polarization.....	88
Polarization and Constituency Relationships: the Deep Connection.....	90
Data and Methods	93
The Interviews: Political Capital, Trust, and Polarized Politics	93
Conclusions.....	100
Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	102
Contributions	105
Future Research	105
Appendix A Code Book.....	107
Bibliography	108

List of Tables

Table 1:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Firm Lobbying Strategy	51
Table 2:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Small Firm Lobbying Strategy	53
Table 3:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Large Firm Lobbying Strategy	54
Table 4:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Lobbying Strategies, base category firms	78
Table 5:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Interest Group Lobbying Strategy	79
Table 6:	Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for All Firms Lobbying Strategy	80

List of Figures

Figure 1: Firm Lobbying Reports by Institution and Year	46
Figure 2: Histogram of Firm Lobbying Reports Filed for Congress	48
Figure 3: Histogram of firm Lobbying Reports Filed for Bureaucracy	48
Figure 4: Histogram of Firm Lobbying Reports Filed for White House	49
Figure 5: Average of Polarization in the House and Senate over time	50
Figure 6: Histogram of Firm Revenue, in Thousands.....	54
Figure 7: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Congress	55
Figure 8: The predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Bureaucracy	56
Figure 9: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying the White House	56
Figure 10: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying Congress	57
Figure 11: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy	58
Figure 12: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying Congress for Large Firms	59
Figure 13: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Small firms.....	59
Figure 14: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Large Firms	60

Figure 15: The Predicted Effect of Congressional Polarization Reports of Lobbying Congress for Large Firms	61
Figure 16: The Predicted Effect of Congressional Polarization Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Large Firms	62
Figure 17: All Lobbying Reports in Agriculture by Institution and Year	74
Figure 18: Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for Congress	76
Figure 19: Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for Bureaucracy	76
Figure 20: Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for White House	77
Figure 21: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Congress	81
Figure 22: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Bureaucracy	82

Chapter 1: Introduction

Today Congress finds itself in a new era of polarization (Rosenthal and Poole 2015). While many have bemoaned the gridlock of a do-nothing Washington (for example see, Blake 2014), interest group lobbying, measured in dollars spent, has risen fairly steadily in this environment (Influence & Lobbying 2014). Why is this? Gridlock should mean Congress does less, requiring less advocacy from interest groups, and considerably less advocacy from corporate interests who tend to prefer the status quo (Drutman 2015). Yet, corporations and interest groups appear to be lobbying as much as ever, and much more than a decade ago when Congress was considerably less polarized.

This dissertation looks to lobbying in the Agricultural sector to explain what interest groups are doing in Washington, how they're doing it, and why they're doing so much of it. I argue that polarization is destabilizing long-standing subsystems and creating new opportunities for interest group influence; and I find that lobbyists are adapting their advocacy strategies to adjust to this new and evolving political environment.

Why look at the agricultural sector, specifically, to explain lobbying strategies? From an academic perspective, food and agriculture policy has been a traditional sector for subsystem studies (see Browne 1995; Hansen 1991; A. D. Sheingate 2003). From a policy perspective, we have seen perverse outcomes from this sector in particular. Between 1975 and 2005 the obesity rate has increased from around 20 percent to over 30 percent, raising the average weight of Americans by about 20 pounds (Dreifus 2012). This "obesity epidemic" has its roots in a major change in agricultural policy that occurred in the 1970s. During this decade, the government began to encourage farmers to produce as much food as possible, instead of paying farmers to limit their production, as

had previously been the practice. Simultaneously, the “green revolution” made farms far more productive, reducing the cost of food and increasing the number of calories available to the average American (Dreifus 2012).

This obesity epidemic has not affected all Americans equally, however. Low wages increase the probability of obesity (Kim and Leigh 2010); in other words, poverty and obesity are related. This is because the cheapest calories are those calories that come from fast food and highly processed foods. A higher number of calories are now available to the average American than previously in history, but they aren’t necessarily desirable or nutritious calories. The difference between healthy and unhealthy eating (consuming whole grains, fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables, as opposed to fast foods and highly processed foods) is about \$1.50 per day, which adds up to an additional \$550 per year (Godoy 2013; Rao et al. 2013). This is not an insignificant barrier to healthy eating for low-income individuals and for those on the supplemental nutrition assistance program.

The relative cost of some calories compared to others, and the resulting obesity epidemic, is consequence of a policy infrastructure¹ that subsidizes some kinds of foods (both monetarily and through policy) and not others. Why is the policy infrastructure that produces these distortions so resistant to change, and how did it come resemble its current form?

The answer to this question is that policy is, in large, a result of the interactions between policymakers and interest groups,² particularly those groups who lobby. Through a study of agricultural policy, this dissertation asks what lobbying strategies interest groups use to achieve their preferred policy outcomes and how political environment shapes interactions between lawmakers and lobbyists. Among lobbying

¹ The specific set of policies that organize society.

² I use the terms “interest group(s)” and “interest(s)” interchangeably in this proposal.

interests, there is considerable variation in behavior – different groups use different strategies. This is true both of an individual lobbying interest group across time, and of various interest groups during a single point in time. This variation raises the question: how do interest groups decide whom to lobby, Congress or the bureaucracy,³ and why? In spite of the vast literature on lobbying, we have surprisingly few answers to this question. Answering this question may provide some insight into the ways in which American public policy is made and the negotiation process that occurs behind closed doors.

SIGNIFICANCE

Recent agricultural policy is weighted heavily toward large producers, highly processed foods, and factory farming. In 2012, farms with sales of \$1 million or more (just 4% of all farms) accounted for 66 percent of all US agricultural products sold (2012 Census Highlights 2015). This skew to the system has enormous benefits, both monetary and policy.⁴ America is often referred to as the “bread basket of the world,” because of its role as the top agricultural exporter in the world, as 30 percent of U.S. produced crops are exported (Ag 101: Economic Overview 2013). U.S. farmers are, in fact, the most productive in the history of the world, and food is cheaper in the United States than in any other developed country in the world (Ag 101: Economic Overview 2013). This presents benefits both in terms of guaranteeing national food security, and in providing food aid for third-world and developing countries.

Yet, the current mix of policies has high associated costs. While health is certainly one well-known and publicized cost, there are other more submerged costs.

³ By bureaucracy I mean those federal agencies tasked with implementation of federal law.

⁴ Policy benefits can include any type of non-monetary benefit a corporation or individual might receive from government. For example, the American sugar industry receives protection from the government, allowing sugar to be sold within the US at an average of 6 cents per pound average than the world price (Worstell 2017).

Cheap food often comes at the price of humane labor conditions, which affect everyone from day laborers in the fields, to factory workers, to fast-food industry employees. Americans also pay a price in environmental impact, as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) produce waste-lagoons, super-bugs, and run-off from pesticides and fertilizers contaminate our water sources (also known as eutrophication). Further, factory farming and profit-maximizing slaughtering pose problems with animal abuse and cruelty. Finally, there are questions of food access in low-income communities, both because of the increase in food-deserts and therefore the availability of fresh food, and because of increased poverty. In fact, for the first time in four decades, the majority of students in public schools throughout the south and west come from low-income families (A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South and Nation 2013). We must decide if, and how, these students receive nourishment subsidized by government, through programs like WIC or the National School Lunch Program.

In sum, the existing food system is a result of a variety of policies that, together, constitute an agricultural policy regime. These policies include direct monetary incentives to produce some kinds of crops rather than others (subsidies); regulations regarding everything from labeling and advertising to pesticide use; energy policies designating the proportion of ethanol that gasoline should contain; labor laws dictating the age at which children may begin working in agriculture;⁵ and protections for various American industries such as sugar (see footnote four). Often the line separating food policy from other policy battles is a thin one; for instance, agriculture work and immigration policy are closely interrelated, as agricultural workers often acquire temporary visas to become day-laborers, then remain as undocumented workers as their

⁵ Children as young as fourteen are allowed to work in fields, and the legal age for hazardous work in agriculture is set at sixteen (as opposed to eighteen in other industries).

visas expire. These workers have very limited legal protections, and are vulnerable to becoming essentially slaves in the agricultural industry. In short, our agricultural policy regime has broad and far-reaching consequences due to the interconnected nature of American public policy (particularly labor, health, and food policy).

How did we wind up with our current agricultural policy regime? One explanation has to do with the ways in which the state, citizens, and groups interact with each other. There are a variety of players in the policy process, all of whom attempt to manipulate the content of law. Political scientists have long grappled, in particular, with the subject of interest group influence, asking the question: in the US, do interest groups have advantages in influencing government behavior or outputs? Further, if these groups are particularly advantaged, where does that advantage stem from? Literature on subsystems⁶ has debated these questions vigorously, particularly focusing on how much access interest groups have to policymakers. Some scholars have found relatively closed or captured subsystems, indicating a high level of access and influence (Hansen 1991; Worsham 2006); while others have found open and fluid subsystems or even relatively autonomous government actors, indicating a lower level of access or influence (Browne 1988; Finegold 1995; Gais, Peterson, and Walker 1984; A. D. Sheingate 2003).

Looking at variations in interest group lobbying strategy can offer insight into this debate by helping scholars understand the differences between large and small interest groups, high-spending and low-spending lobbying interests, and different types of lobbying interest groups. Therefore, this dissertation asks: how do the variety of interest

⁶ I define subsystems as informal decision-making arrangements or structures within government that often encompass extra-governmental entities such as lobbyists and industry.

groups representing agricultural, food, and commodity producers, lobby Congress and the bureaucracy⁷ in order to influence policy outputs? What are their lobbying strategies?

Worth noting, though perhaps obvious, is that this dissertation assumes that lobbying does matter. The alternative assumption would be that groups irrationally continue to pour money into an exercise that produces no results. Though it is possible that the interests that cumulatively spent over \$3.5 billion dollars in 2009 on the practice were misinformed about the effectiveness of their endeavors, it seems unlikely (Influence & Lobbying 2014), particularly given the collective action barriers that these groups must overcome in order to engage in lobbying (Olson 1971). I offer an empirical means to understand lobbying strategies, and the way that these strategies change in response to changes in the institutional and political environment.

There are several notable tools which interest groups might use to directly influence policy: one is to insert favorable language directly into law, either into the original language of a bill, or through amendment of a bill.⁸ A second possibility is through the expansion or application of bureaucratic power.⁹ This argument has been advanced by a longtime student of policymaking, “when agribusiness feels it necessary to lobby, its main concern is with the highly specific effects of administrative rulings or regulatory legislation” (Browne 1982), but has not yet been fully explored. Indeed, those interest groups that have close relationships with bureaucracies, or believe that they can

⁷ Lobbying the bureaucracy can mean a variety of activities, from conducting ex parte meetings, to organizing a public comment campaign, to inviting bureaucrats to events orchestrated for their benefit.

⁸ For instance, persuading legislators to raise the direct subsidy amount of sorghum.

⁹ A current example is the USDA’s consideration of new rules, which would allow poultry processing plants to increase poultry slaughter assembly line speeds against the preferences of poultry line workers who fear disabling musculoskeletal injuries.

effectively lobby bureaucracies for favorable policies, may prefer that bureaucratic rule making power be expanded in relevant areas.¹⁰

Interest groups might also employ former members of Congress, their aides, or alternatively, they may have close connections with former employees who are now bureaucrats. These kinds of substantive influence are far subtler, and often more difficult to measure, than vote changes – but they are fundamental to the production of American public policy. Revolving door influence, for instance, increases access that groups have to decision-makers, but does not necessarily alter the mechanisms mentioned above.

Agricultural policy is a particularly good subsystem for studying interest group influence. It has a long policy history, beginning in the 1930s with the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and has expanded in scope and importance since. Indeed, the agricultural subsystem has consequently been the subject of many subsystem studies in political science (see Browne 1988; Hansen 1991; A. D. Sheingate 2003, among others). By limiting the study to a single subsystem, this dissertation is able to closely examine the changing relationships between interest groups, Congress, and the bureaucracy.

WHAT DO WE KNOW AND HOW DO WE STUDY LOBBYING: A BRIEF SUMMARY

The study of lobbying begins with the assumption that groups want their preferences to be represented in the governing system. There are many ways that organized interests can achieve their desired outcomes: means such as public relations, litigation, illegal activities (acting on firm preferences in conflict with the law might occur when penalties are small but payoffs are large), making campaign or PAC

¹⁰ Expanding regulations nearly always increases the cost of entry into an industry, and thus reduces competition. An example of this might be the Food Safety and Modernization Act, signed into law in 2011, which expanded FDA oversight of domestic and imported food products. Large producers were highly in favor of this and lobbied strongly in favor, while smaller producer groups opposed quite strongly. New FDA rules are likely to be far easier for large producers to comply with given the associated costs, thus pushing many smaller producers out of business and reducing competition.

contributions (potentially resulting in quid pro quo exchanges between interests and lawmakers), and lobbying directed at either Congress or the bureaucracy. However, not all these behaviors are equal in their potential payoffs. For example, litigation carries the risk that existing law might not be interpreted in a group's interests. Free media can be unpredictable, and leaves an interest with very little control over the message. Illegal activity, such as running a slaughter line at a faster than legal speed, could lead to negative public opinion or legal consequences, creating unanticipated costs that exceed the payoffs. Further, each behavior has heavy costs (paying public relations firms, hiring lawyers, organizing politically, etc.), meaning that groups must calculate the relative trade-offs and benefits gained from each path. Presumably, having one's preferences represented in law is the ultimate payoff for any interest, though this does not mean that all interest groups will expend the energy to gain this benefit. For this reason, if interests do choose to seek representation in the body of law, making campaign contributions on a quid pro quo basis or engaging in lobbying might be preferable.

Research investigating the potential quid pro quo relationship between organized interests and politicians has often looked to campaign contributions to measure influence. However, the findings regarding quid pro quo tradeoffs between members of Congress and interest groups suggest that the exchange is far subtler than quid pro quo, and indeed, that campaign contributions do not necessarily lead to favorable legislative outputs (Hall and Wayman 1990; Milyo, Primo, and Groseclose 2000; Welch 1982). While one study on the legislation of milk subsidies did find a direct connection between Congressional behavior and campaign contributions, it found that members of Congress were rewarded after a favorable vote rather than before one (Welch 1982). Notably, campaign contributions do motivate members to spend more time on an issue (Hall and Wayman 1990). In short, the evidence suggests that interest groups cannot rely solely on campaign

contributions to gain favorable legislation, though certainly campaign contributions might be helpful.

That interests are not buying votes does not mean that they are not swaying vote choices. One analysis shows committee level voting by a member of the U.S. Agricultural or Ways and Means Committees is best explained by the number of contacts that member received from groups on each side of an issue (Wright 1990). Other research has attempted to draw parallels between lobbying expenditures and political action committee (PAC) campaign contributions. They conclude that because lobbying expenditures mirror PAC campaign contribution expenditures, which have been found to have no effect, lobbying must not affect policy outcomes (Milyo, Primo, and Groseclose 2000). Still others have found that PAC contributions, and thus lobbying, are influential in Congressional decision making (Langbein 1993). However, extending findings from campaign finance in order to draw conclusions on lobbying is inappropriate, and many PAC studies fail to directly measure lobbying in any case (Baumgartner and Leech 1998). The conclusion that lobbying must not be effective because there is not a clear effect from campaign contributions counters intuition as well as evidence from other fields.

Lobbying is distinctly different than campaign contributions in its nature and purpose; lobbying involves no direct transfer of capital between interests and members of Congress (J. M. de Figueiredo 2002). Lobbying can instead be defined relatively broadly as an attempt to persuade or encourage legislators (Denzau and Munger 1986; Hall and Wayman 1990; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998).

The importance of lobbying to corporate value is demonstrated in a variety of studies emerging from business schools and business journals. Several studies have found that corporations engage in lobbying government with so as to influence financial regulation and legislation, and to otherwise increase gains in the marketplace (Alexander,

Mazza, and Scholz 2009; Blau, Brough, and Thomas 2011; Hill et al. 2013; Hochberg, Sapienza, and Vissing-Jørgensen 2009; Mathur and Singh 2011; Mian, Sufi, and Trebbi 2010; Richter 2011; Yu and Yu 2012). Firms engaged in lobbying experienced a return of over \$220 for every \$1 spent on lobbying according to Alexander, Mazza, and Scholz (2009). Yet, business literature on lobbying tends to over-simplify governmental processes and actors, and to ignore what political scientists consider to be key political variables such as public opinion (which constitutes a considerable omission when studying hot-button financial issues such as the Wall Street bailout in 2008). Further, some research has suggested that what corporate lobbyists are really getting out of lobbying is an assurance that politicians will be inactive – a guarantee of the status quo (Drutman 2015; McChesney 1997).

One way to explain the discrepancy between the null findings regarding vote change in political science and the positive findings of influence in the business literature is due problematic methodological approaches within both literatures. Political science often relies on self-reporting through interviews and surveys in order to determine the effect of lobbying; it is no surprise that politicians might prefer to say that they are not swayed by lobbying and that they think only of their constituents when making decisions. McChesney's rent extraction theory above, in which corporations pay for political inaction, also helps explain why political scientists so often experience "null" findings when it comes to vote change in response to lobbying. Still, measuring lobbying effectiveness presents additional problems.

Relying on roll call vote change as a measure of lobbying effectiveness is a very blunt measure (and fails to account for the possibility of a preference for the status-quo). Perhaps lobbying serves a purpose other than swaying votes. "Most quantitative assessments of group influence tend to overlook a well-documented truth about

policymaking: most action takes place long before the floor vote... the focus on votes also makes it easy for scholars mistakenly to begin thinking about influence as a dichotomous, rather than continuous, variable..." according to Baumgartner and Leech (1998, 137–138). Indeed, vote change is a high bar at best, by which to measure lobby success, and a nearly impossible bar at worst. A lobbyist would need to persuade a legislator to potentially overlook his or her personal preferences, as well as potentially overlook the preferences of his or her constituency in order to change a "no" vote to a "yes." Further, looking at votes alone disguises the "sausage making" process, and the sausage making of committee work is where essential policy details are negotiated (Baumgartner and Leech 1998).

The legislative subsidy literature indicates that lobbying begins long before the final vote tally is taken, and looking only at votes ignores the many possible points of influence throughout the legislative process. Indeed, influence may be exerted by providing legislative language, persuading bureaucracy to advocate for particular policies, or by litigating after legislation has passed. Another possible avenue of influence for interest groups is simply providing information to policymakers.

By providing information (both policy and political), rather than buying votes, lobbyists are in the potentially powerful position of participating in the policy construction process, as they attempt to structure the range of policy proposals being considered.¹¹ Lobbyists engage primarily in providing information to lawmakers, a behavior that occurs over time and well before voting occurs on the floor. Here information acquisition is costly to lawmakers either because of scarcity, or because information is plentiful and winnowing is highly time consuming. Information is not

¹¹ Whether or not lobbying should be considered a form of agenda setting is debatable, as it has been argued that lobbyists determine those issues on which they will lobby after the agenda has been set by members of Congress (Baumgartner and Leech 1998).

provided on a quid pro quo basis; rather, information is provided to assist lawmakers who are in relevant offices or who have similar policy positions to the interested groups. Existing “money and politics” literature offers significant reason to believe that lobbying does provide a substantial informational benefit to both legislators and interest groups. In fact, quite a bit of the existing literature in this field focuses on the potential of lobbying as a legislative subsidy (Austen-Smith 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1992; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Hall and Deardorff 2006), and there is evidence that hearing testimony impacts political decision-making (Segal, Cameron, and Cover 1992).

Lobbying occurs primarily inside the world of Congress and the bureaucracy. And, while lobbying is a method for groups to achieve desirable outcomes, it also enables Congress to achieve its ends. Congress is organized into committees to specialize in information gathering and creating legislation. These committees must identify problems (define the problem space), and propose solutions. The committee system solves several problems for Congress: organizing and winnowing information, allowing credit claiming (necessary for reelection), allowing legislators to work on those issues they care most about, and providing particularized benefits. However, even within the committee system, legislators still individually face the problem of problems of gathering and winnowing information. Because attention is scarce (Simon 1985), subsystems allow committees to screen the information and actors to whom they devote attention; and lobbying is, in some sense, a service that groups provide to legislators in order to reduce information costs.

Like the relationship between lobbyists and Congress, the relationship between bureaucracies and lobbyists is also mutually beneficial. Lobbying provides bureaucrats with political information and allows bureaucracies to respond to their constituencies (namely, the interests whom they work with and serve). And, as with Congress, lobbying

provides bureaucrats with policy information, thus reducing information costs. Bureaucracies often make policy beyond that which Congress directs them to do in real time; bureaucratic rules may be made in response to legislation passed a decade previous.

In addition to reducing policy-relevant information costs for Congress and the bureaucracy, lobbying also plays an important role in the principal agent relationship between Congress and the bureaucracy. Interests are able to participate in fire-alarm oversight of bureaucracy, alerting Congressional committees to the need for oversight hearings or new controls on bureaucracy. Simultaneously, as interests lobby the bureaucracy for preferably policy outputs, they also keep bureaucracy informed of their preferences and positions, allowing bureaucracy to avoid potential oversight by responding to conflicts as they arise. Lobbying thus serves as a link between bureaucracy and Congress, creating a triangular relationship of sorts.

Indeed, the subsystem idea originates with an iron-triangle literature, which depicts a nearly unbreakable and impermeable relationship between Congressional committees, interest groups, and the bureaucracy. Though political scientists no longer consider this relationship as necessarily being ironclad, they continue to envision the relationships between these actors as a sort of sub-government in which a significant proportion of decision-making occurs. In sum, subsystems can be thought of as informal decision-making institutions¹² within government. Subsystems theory emphasizes the role of public and private organizations (i.e. interest groups); it suggests that the policy process has become decentralized and fragmented, allowing for informal alliances in the policy making process (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Gais, Peterson, and Walker 1984; Smith and Larimer 2009).

¹² “Broadly defined, institutions are the prescriptions that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions” (Ostrom 2005, 3). In other words, institutions can be thought of as the rules and norms that humans use to structure interactions.

These subsystems allow Congress and the bureaucracy to pay special attention to those interests who are most concerned about an issue, and who will therefore provide the most policy and politics relevant information. Lobbying is one primary way that interests both inside and outside of a subsystem can transmit information both to Congress and to the bureaucracy. This subsystem literature explains the fluidity with which various groups enter and exit the policymaking process. Groups will want to participate only in those policy decisions on which they have some interest, and given the increasingly niche nature of the policy process, this may mean engaging with relatively few issues (Browne 1990). In other words, interest groups are strategic.

Viewing professional lobbyists as strategic actors who provide information, political intelligence, and legislative labor to deliberately chosen legislators suggests that lobbyists do not necessarily change legislators minds; rather, they look to assist legislators who are already aligned with their preferences (Austen-Smith 1995; Hall and Deardorff 2006). In short, lobbying is largely a strategic information transmission, intended to influence legislative decision-making by providing information that might otherwise be costly for legislators to acquire (Austen-Smith 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1992). And, as noted, lobbying also benefits legislators by bearing some of the costs that they would otherwise incur.

Yet the subsystem literature often stops short of describing the internal negotiation involved in lobbying. By simplifying the triangular relationship between Congress, the bureaucracy, and interest groups, the literature often imagines the “interest group” as a monolith. This dissertation fills the lacuna by researching the tradeoffs that interest groups make, and how the political environment impacts those decisions. Specifically, the dissertation uses agricultural policy as the vehicle by which to study subsystems and interest group behavior.

For many reasons, agricultural policy is a particularly good study of subsystem influence. Political science has historically used agriculture as a representative case for these kinds of studies. In fact, it has been argued that, "agriculture, as one of the oldest organized sets of interests involved in influencing U.S. public policy... is arguably the best possible choice for such a study" (1988, 3). Additionally, agricultural and related industries are enormous players in the U.S. economy, contributing about \$9.95 trillion to the nominal GDP in 2012, and employing over one-sixth of the U.S. civilian labor force (Ag 101: Economic Overview 2013, 101). By looking at lobbying in the agriculture sector alone, this dissertation examines the internal mechanisms of lobbying decisions while eliminating the noise potentially caused by minor variation between issue areas.

THE PUZZLE AND THE ARGUMENT

Interest groups should be expected to lobby Congress and the bureaucracy in the manner that they believe will achieve the most desirable outcomes (profit maximization for corporate interests; public goods for consumer interests, etc.) However, even among interests that might presumably have the same or similar goals, there are differing lobbying strategies. In short, there exists variation in the distribution of lobbying, by different interests at any given time, and by the same interests over time, between Congress and the bureaucracy. Therefore this research addresses the following question: what institutional and political factors determine a firm's or interest's strategic decision regarding whom to lobby?

The very few previous studies of strategies of lobbying have generally looked across all issue areas to determine whether Congress or the Executive receives more lobbying attention, and under what conditions (Gause and Lorenz 2014; McKay 2011; McQuide 2010). These studies have found that conflict attracts a higher level of lobbying

toward both Congress and the bureaucracy (McKay 2011), and that the higher salience an issue is, the more likely groups are to lobby Congress specifically (Gause and Lorenz 2014). Along these lines, Leech et al. show that groups often become involved in lobbying Washington because of pre-existing levels of government activity in issue areas that concern them (2005). Finally, interest groups are more likely to lobby in a venue when their opposition is lobbying in that venue (Holyoke 2003a).

One contribution of this dissertation is to look more closely at a specific issue area, agriculture, and to determine the mechanisms by which interest groups make these lobbying decisions. This dissertation includes those variables that were found to be significant in previous studies, as well as adding several new variables for consideration. The empirical contribution of this dissertation is to explain the variation in strategies of lobbying with special attention to how political environment impacts these decisions.

To better explain this variation this dissertation pays special attention to two variables of particular interest: interest group revenue and Congressional polarization. As previously noted, one of the lacunas in existing literature occurs at the intersection of political science and business literatures. Political scientists rarely try to use firm-level data when studying lobbying, in spite of the findings from business literature that indicate a considerable fiscal barrier to entry into political advocacy (Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathur and Singh 2011); while business literature on lobbying tends to oversimplify governmental processes and actors. By considering both individual-level characteristics of lobbying firms and the political context in which interest groups are acting, this dissertation bridges the research gap between business and political science.

In this dissertation I make and support three main claims. The first is that Congressional polarization is strengthening the influence of interest groups in Washington. The second is that financial barriers, combined with constituency-based

connections to members of Congress result in a stratified lobbying abilities among interest groups and necessitate different strategies by these groups. Those groups who have both financial resources, and can claim to speak for a relevant constituency, will generally find far more success in their lobbying efforts. And finally, the third claim is that lobbying is a self-reinforcing activity. Once an interest group begins to find success in their political advocacy they will continue to do so, while struggling groups are simply left behind in a Darwinian process that rewards the strongest with legislative success and often excludes the weakest from policy benefits all together.

If my claims are accurate, I expect to see that polarization will drive an increase in interest group lobbying Congress and a corresponding decrease in lobbying the Bureaucracy, as interest groups flock to the venue in which they have greater impact. I expect this for all types of lobbying groups; but the caveat to this is that I also expect that firms who have higher revenue will do considerably more lobbying in all venues and see considerably more success from their efforts, both because they are able to do so and because they speak for a larger potential constituency, while firms with lower revenue will be more strategic in their behavior.

RESEARCH DESIGN, IN BRIEF

In order to test the above assertions, this dissertation uses a multi-method approach of both statistical analysis and interviews with lobbyists, legislative staffers, and reporters. The statistical chapters consider lobbying groups by type: interest groups, firms, local governments, and unions, while the interview chapter consults with a variety of lobbyists, legislative staffers, and journalists.

The first statistical chapter considers corporate lobbying, while the final statistical chapter compares four categories of lobbying groups: interest groups, firms, local

governments, and unions. Both of these chapters rely on data from the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) of 1995. The original LDA of 1995 required lobbying reports from any organization spending or earning more than \$10,000 in a six-month period on lobbying the federal government; the legislation has since been updated to cover organizations that spend more than \$3000 on lobbying activities during a given quarter (Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance 2013). These reports are limited in their content, but provide a useful and quantifiable measure of the amount of lobbying activity occur in a given sector, year, and branch of government.

The interview-based chapter explains the strategic reasoning behind firm and interest group lobbying strategies and gives special attention to the efficacy of various strategies under polarized political conditions. This chapter relies on a series of loosely structured interviews with a total of 18 Washington insiders, conducted over a two-year period. These individuals discussed everything from coalition building, to writing bill provisions, to delivering presentations in front of the Office of Management and Budget. These interviews provide insight into how lobbyists and legislative staffers view their jobs and what strategies they find most useful in their endeavors to influence public policy.

Ultimately, using a multi-method, multi-level approach allows the dissertation to consider how revenue impacts lobbying strategy and influence, to consider how political polarization influences the policy process, and to make arguments as to the logic and efficacy of various lobbying strategies in our increasingly polarized environment.

PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

I begin by laying out the theoretical foundations for the research. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the lobbying literature and demonstrates the theoretical and empirical place that this dissertation fits. In this chapter I detail the nature of the

Agricultural subsystem and explain how polarization is altering the political landscape in unprecedented ways and what we can expect from lobbying organizations as a result. Finally, this chapter argues that polarization is exaggerating the self-reinforcing nature of influence in Washington.

Chapter 3 uses a statistical analysis of corporate lobbying in agriculture from 1998 through 2013 as the first test of the theories advanced in this dissertation. Looking at firm behavior at the outset is advantageous because of the added information available regarding firms (revenue and headquarter location), as well as the homogeneity of corporate lobbying purpose. Corporations lobby with the single goal of profit maximization, rather than for altruistic or collective purposes (Alexander, Mazza, and Scholz 2009; Blau, Brough, and Thomas 2011; Hill et al. 2013; Hochberg, Sapienza, and Vissing-Jørgensen 2009; Mathur and Singh 2011; Mian, Sufi, and Trebbi 2010; Richter 2011; Yu and Yu 2012). This chapter includes political variables and shows the enormous impact polarization has on corporate lobbying behavior, particularly in increasing the amount of lobbying that small firms do in Congress.

Chapter 4 also relies on statistical analysis of LDA data to show that firms are not the only organizations altering their lobbying behavior in response to political polarization. This chapter shows that polarization is increasing Congressional lobbying across the board, and driving down lobbying of bureaucratic agencies. Indeed, interest groups show an even stronger propensity for this pattern of venue change than corporate organizations.

Chapter 5 uses author interviews with lobbyists, legislative staffers, and journalists to flesh out why polarization is driving an increase in lobbying in Congress and how it changes the role of lobbyists in the Agricultural subsystem. This chapter finds that polarization is creating an increased role for lobbyists in the process of negotiating

legislation. Lobbyists often do the heavy lifting of creating coalitional support for controversial legislation, making it possible for politicians to vote across the aisle in an environment that more and more frequently pushes legislators to cast party-line votes.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter 6, which summarizes the findings presented here and synthesizes the practical implications of these findings for politics. This chapter also considers avenues for future research and suggests what developments political scientists might look for with regards to lobbying in Washington, as polarization becomes the new norm.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theory

Firms, people, and organizations that lobby government (henceforth, referred to under the banner of “interests” or “interest groups”) do so because they hope to influence public policy, either in the form of public laws or regulations. These groups must be strategic in how they proceed in their lobbying behavior. Why? Because (for some) resources are finite; because, for all, political capital is finite; and because, above all, reputation is key (Hansen 1991; Milbrath 1963). Interest groups who seek to influence law must be smart, resourceful, and savvy in their attempts, while simultaneously being perceived as trustworthy by those who they hope to influence. To this end, I assume that groups will engage in those behaviors that they believe will yield the most favorable outcomes.

The first question then is: what strategies do they employ? What lobbying strategies do groups believe to be most effective and under what conditions? The second question is: do the activities that groups engage in align with our current understandings and assumptions about the political world?

In this dissertation I present three main findings. The first is that unprecedented polarization in Congress is creating new possibilities for interest group influence through lobbying. I show that as Congress experiences increased gridlock and a reduced capacity for compromise and negotiation, interest groups increase their lobbying efforts – seeing this as an opportunity to peddle their preferred policy solutions and negotiate between parties that are (figuratively) at war.

Second, I show that financial resources (“deep pockets”) are necessary, but not sufficient, for effective corporate lobbying. I find that financial resources in combination

with constituency-based relationships with members of Congress a leading factor in lobbying strategy (and success) for most firms who choose to lobby.

Finally, for both firms and interest groups, at large, I show that lobbying is a highly self-reinforcing activity. Once groups become involved in political advocacy, they develop the skills necessary to succeed. As a group begins to see success from their lobbying efforts, they find new and continued reasons to participate in politics.

This chapter lays out the theoretical reasoning behind those expectations and situates this study and its contributions in the broader political science literature. Section one of this chapter details the nature of political subsystems and the environment that has historically been thought to affect lobbying behavior. Section two hones in on the specific capacity of organizations to lobby, and how that capacity translates to lobbying effectiveness. The third section elaborates on the self-reinforcing nature of institutions, and illustrate why we should expect similarly self-reinforcing behavior from interest groups as well.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, SUBSYSTEMS, AND INTEREST GROUPS

Subsystems are the informal micro-institutions in which lobbying occurs.¹³ They consist of committees, interest groups, and bureaucracies who, together, make policy-relevant decisions. These subsystems (once known as iron triangles) form and reform as policy ideas come and go, attracting different players and interests with each new policy idea. While the core elements may remain, the coalitions and players can shift.

One key question that political scientists have discussed is how open subsystems are to new “players.” In other words, when new policy ideas come on to the agenda, are new participants able to enter the subsystem and influence the decision-making process?

¹³ The mezzo-institution might be agencies, the branches of government, and so forth, while macro-institutions might include the government as a whole, the constitution, and so on.

Some scholars have found relatively closed or captured subsystems, indicating a high level of access and influence for a few interest groups, and low access for others (Hansen 1991; Worsham 2006). Others have found open and fluid subsystems or even relatively autonomous government actors, indicating a lower level of access or influence for any one interest group, but allowing many to impact the policy process in smaller ways (Browne 1988; Finegold 1995; Gais, Peterson, and Walker 1984; Sheingate 2003). Many of these scholars have used agriculture policy as a case study in their research, but there is no consensus on which kind of subsystem agricultural policy falls in to.

Whether open or closed, the agricultural subsystem has historically been a remarkably bipartisan policy area. However, the subsystem is now in a moment of flux, and legislation (particularly the farm bill) is becoming highly contentious (Sheingate 2013). In 2008, for example, Congress easily overrode a presidential veto on the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, with a final tally of 316-to-108 in the House, and 80-14 in the Senate. But just six short years later, in 2013 (one year after the expiration of the 2008 farm bill), the farm bill failed in the House of Representatives. What should have been the 2013 farm bill, titled the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013, was not signed in to law until January 2014.

Why did the farm bill struggle so badly in the House of Representatives in 2013? The answer lies in increasing polarization, and particularly in the increasing extremism of Republicans. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) wanted stricter cuts to food stamps and a toughening of work requirements for those receiving benefits. Frank Lucas (R-OK), then chairman of the Agriculture Committee balked, knowing that such a move would undercut support from Democrats, both in the committee and on the floor. In response, Cantor pushed an amendment by Steve Southerland (R-FL) that would have achieved these ends and resulted in severe cuts to hunger and nutrition programs (Rogers

2013). When the farm bill came to the floor, Republicans largely voted for the amendment, which (as predicted) undercut Democratic support for the bill. Ultimately, 62 conservative Republicans still ended up voting against the farm bill, saying that it did not cut spending enough; while most Democrats also voted against. Eventually the Senate version of the bill became law, though neither side was pleased with the content. The final version of the bill included \$8 billion in cuts to hunger and nutrition programs (such as the supplemental nutrition assistance program), which was a far cry from the \$40 billion cut that some Republicans had called for. And, while lawmakers claimed that it was a bipartisan effort, not a single Republican lawmaker attended the signing of the law, though many were invited (Good 2014).

This struggle illustrates the possible dissolution of a coalition between conservative farm policy advocates and liberal hunger policy advocates who had consistently worked together on agricultural legislation. If the agricultural subsystem was not open before, it certainly is becoming so now. The current agriculture subsystem is showing telltale signs of being in a moment of instability (as in *Agendas and Instability* Baumgartner and Jones 1993). While it is difficult to tell if the subsystem is on the brink of collapse and reformation, we can tell that partisanship is moving and shaking the internal relationships within Congress (Gray et al. 2015; Sinclair 2006a; Theriault 2013) and that extends to agricultural interests therein.

The clear partisan breakdown of a historically bipartisan arena opens the possibility to observing how lobbyists and interest groups behave as the political ground under them shifts. What happens when coalitions break down, partisanship increases, and negotiations fall apart? Does increasing partisanship affect the lobbying strategy that interest groups use? Should we expect that it would?

The literature suggests: maybe. Baumgartner and Jones argue that controversy increases the likelihood that decision-making authority may shift between venues (1993, 34). Increasing polarization, as an instigator of conflict, is therefore a potential catalyst for forcing interest groups to change their lobbying strategies. If the subsystem does not fall apart, sending groups to the courts or to local venues (which does not appear to happen), then it may be appropriate to look for venue changes within the subsystem. Within the subsystem, interest groups have several options for lobbying. Within Congress, groups can move between committees depending on how any given committee is likely to view a particular issue. But they can also move between institutions since each institution may have a different understanding of the issue (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 31). Venues may be more or less sympathetic to the perspective of an interest group or set of interests (Holyoke 2003b). Lobbying groups may approach Congress, the Bureaucracy, and, or, the White House. And certainly, at any time, interest groups can, and do, work with any of these formal institutions in order to achieve their preferences. Switching between these venues one possible way to venue shop without abandoning the enterprise all together.

Bureaucracy literature suggests that when the two chambers of the legislature are of the same party, but the executive branch is controlled by the opposite party, legislators are more likely to use statutory controls over the bureaucracy (Epstein and O'Halloran 1995; Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001). In other words, they will write more detailed legislation, giving the bureaucracy less discretion over the implementation process. The opposite is true when legislators have less capacity (Epstein and O'Halloran 1995; Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001). When the legislature is divided, the bureaucracy will have more discretion for implementation because the legislature may be unable to agree on

more detailed legislation. They effectively “pass the buck,” as it were, to the implementing agency.

While the bureaucracy literature specifically discusses delegation in the context of a divided legislature versus a unified government. However, the logic of delegating more when the legislature struggles to compromise ought to extend to those times when government may be unified, but polarization is high. During times of high polarization Congress ought to cede more implementation authority to bureaucracies because it will, similarly, have more difficulty agreeing on detailed legislation. Yet, such logic does not jive terribly well with literature on Congress, or on policymaking and agenda setting, for that matter.

Polarization theoretically creates an environment in which we should expect behavior change; yet, we have only weak theories for *how* polarization should change lobbying behavior. An alternative logic suggests that interest groups lobby in venues where the agenda is actively being set (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Interest groups lobby in Congress when relevant legislation is being considered, and in the bureaucracy during the rulemaking process (subsequent to the legislative process). Polarization in Congress leads to increased competition for agenda setting (Baumgartner and Jones 1993); and cyclically, increases in competition lead to more attention on the issue, and therefore more interest group involvement (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Schattschneider 1957). Interest groups “bandwagon” as attention increases, and flock to whichever venue other interest groups are lobbying in (Baumgartner and Leech 2001).

The literature therefore suggests that polarization, because it is a form of conflict, will drive increased attention and bandwagoning. However, I argue that polarization is driving lobbying separate and distinctly as well. Polarization is not only a widening of the

conflict space. It also, as illustrated above, results in the dissolution of long-standing coalitions and the destruction of previously strong (by all appearances) policy architectures. Polarization is whittling away the long-standing relationships such as the historical alliance between hunger advocates and farm advocates, resulting in high uncertainty around the farm bill (Sheingate 2013).

This uncertainty, I argue, creates two parallel incentives for interest groups to increase their lobbying efforts in Congress. The first is an incentive to gather information as traditional alliances and policy ideas break down. Interest groups (perhaps obviously) have a desire to reduce their own uncertainty and to stay abreast with current political negotiations. The second, more important, incentive for interest groups to increase their lobbying in Congress is that as polarization shifts the ground, there is new opportunity to suggest alternative policy ideas. As Congressional capacity for compromise decreases, interest groups have the opportunity to step in as “go-betweens” for offices and negotiate new policy details in their favor. Polarization, I argue, is creating increased opportunity for interest groups to achieve their policy preferences.

Hypothesis: Polarization will increase lobbying efforts in Congress.

While polarization does not occur in the bureaucracy or executive branch in exactly the same way that it does in Congress, evidence suggests that lobbying behavior spills over from Congress in to other branches. At the individual interest group level, increased lobbying in Congress is associated with increased lobbying in the bureaucracy and executive (Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty 2013). If an interest group lobbies a lot (in comparison to other groups), they are likely to do so across all institutions. This effect suggests that venue shopping is less likely to be a tradeoff of “either here or there” than it is to be a trade off of how much here and how much there. As polarization drives interest group lobbying to Congress, it may mean that groups who traditionally engage in high

levels of lobbying across all institutions will be forced to scale back on their lobbying in the bureaucracy or Congress, though not cease it altogether. This depends, in part, on the capacity of, and resources available to, the interest group.

POLITICAL CAPACITY, LOBBYING EFFECTIVENESS

Much of lobbying literature has focused on the informational benefits that lobbying provides to policymakers at all levels of government from legislators to bureaucrats to local governments (lobbying as a legislative subsidy) (Austen-Smith 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1992; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Segal, Cameron, and Cover 1992). The benefits to the party engaged in lobbying are, of course, policy in some form.

Interest groups and trade associations are structured with the sole purpose of political advocacy, so for those groups there is no need to ask, “why engage at all?” since that is their stated mission.

One question is why corporations engage in political activity beyond what they could achieve through their trade associations and other memberships. If a firm has the option of allowing its interest groups do the work of political advocacy, why would they take on the burden individually as well? Coca Cola, for instance, is a member of the American Beverage Association, yet also regularly engages in lobbying independent of the association as well. Why? Simply put, because Coca Cola has the financial resources to do so – they have the ability to engage in more specific advocacy, tailored to their own corporate needs and preferences. Resources are generally thought to be an antecedent to political activity (Laffont and Tirole 1991; Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathura and Singh 2011); and corporations that have the financial resources to engage in lobbying activity outside of their associations often do so (Hillman and Hitt 1999).

One reason that financial resources constitute a considerable barrier to entry is that for any interest group (whether corporate or nonprofit), lobbying is not a one-time, fixed expenditure. Lobbying incurs both short term and long-term costs. Interest groups compete with other groups, and in some cases even with political parties, to provide information to Congress (Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hall and Miler 2008; Hansen 1991). In order to remain a favored source of information a group must be a reliable source of political and policy information over time (Hansen 1991).¹⁴ Groups must therefore commit to making a long-term investment in providing lawmakers with useful information if they want to achieve high levels of access and influence over politics.

The resource commitment that groups must make in order to gain leverage in the political system may result in a drop-off of the number of groups lobbying over time, as the costs associated with political advocacy add up. While groups do seem to have elastic budgets for political activity, these are often not unlimited budgets, and many groups have multiple policy concerns competing for resources and attention. Each time a group pursues a policy further through the process, it increases the resources spent on that policy. For instance, a group may be advocating both for increased wetlands conservation and for improved access to public lands for duck hunters. If one policy objective is not making headway, the group may abandon it in favor of devoting resources toward the other. Further, if achieving policy outcomes in Congress requires an increasing level of resource allocation and attention, groups may begin to scale back their political spending at later points in the policymaking process. If polarization increases the amount of lobbying a group does at the Congressional level, a group may have fewer resources to pursue the matter on the bureaucracy or executive levels of government.

¹⁴ In interviews many lobbyists, both in-house and contract, repeatedly emphasized that reputation is currency in the lobbying industry.

Lobbying is not, of course, a perfectly sequential activity. A group may, at any point during the policy process, decide that lobbying a particular issue is becoming too costly (financially or in terms of political capital), and drop out. Because the primary activities of agencies begin after Congressional activity (during the rulemaking stage), it is reasonable to deduce that less wealthy interest groups may begin to drop out at this stage or at least scale back their efforts, particularly if they have made reasonable gains at the legislative level, while wealthier groups persist to pursue the exact policy details they prefer.

The financial costs associated with length of involvement in the political arena are not the only costs of lobbying, particularly in the bureaucracy. One common strategy groups exercise when looking for regulatory change from bureaucracies is to ask legislators to intercede on their behalf (Holburn and Bergh 2008). Lobbyists also make heavy use of ex-parte meetings with bureaucrats (Watzman 2013b).¹⁵ Ex-parte meetings in particular rely on utilizing existing relationships to incentivize bureaucrats to grant these meetings, as they are informal meetings between bureaucrats and interest groups that occur outside of the rulemaking process. Groups who pursue lobbying at the bureaucratic level therefore often “spend” political capital asking for meetings, an activity that requires possessing political capital in the first place. If groups gain political capital (i.e. access and influence) through long-term involvement in the process and strong, long-standing relationships with policymakers, then resources are essential to success when lobbying agencies in particular.

¹⁵ Several agencies, such as the Federal Communications Commission voluntarily publish some information on ex parte meetings online. However, there is no uniform requirement that information about ex parte meetings between regulators and private interests be made available to the public (Watzman 2013a).

The above strategies for regulatory change presume a legislature that is friendly to the changes that the lobbying group wants to achieve. If, for instance, a bureaucracy is sympathetic to the desires of the interest group, but the legislature is hostile and the bureaucracy is constrained by that hostility, the bureaucracy may simply send the interest group back to Congress, wherein the lobbying process begins anew (Holburn and Bergh 2008). The lobbying process can quickly become arduous and extremely costly if the stars are not aligned just so. Because of the expense associated with continuing to pursue policy, we should expect that there would be considerable drop-off the further in the legislative process a policy gets.

Hypothesis: As polarization incentivizes lobbying Congress, lobbying of the bureaucracy and White House will decrease.

Hypothesis: Groups with fewer financial resources will do less lobbying in the bureaucracy and White House; relying more heavily on constituency-based relationships in Congress and dropping out of the process earlier.

Financial resources are not the only type of resource necessary for a group to maximize its lobbying efforts. As noted above, political capital accumulated through long-term relationships is also useful. Access to and influence over lawmakers is also a matter of providing useful information to lawmakers over time (Drutman 2015; Hansen 1991). Specifically, interest groups provide policy information, political intelligence, and legislative labor to deliberately chosen legislators (Austen-Smith 1995; Hall and Deardorff 2006). Policy information is a matter of expertise, and any group can cultivate information expertise should it wish to. However, providing political intelligence is more difficult. In order to provide “political intelligence,” a group must have some intelligence that is of use to legislators; and the kind of political intelligence that is the most useful to legislators is that related to their reelection prospects (Mayhew 1974). Lobbying is more

useful to a legislator when the lobbying group can provide some information on the legislator's home district, constituency, and political chances therein.

Because reelection information is highly prized, lobbying is more effective when an interest group or firm is based in the district of a relevant committee member (de Figueiredo and Silverman 2006). This means that if, for instance, the House Agricultural Committee is largely composed of members from Texas, Nebraska, and California, then organized interests with large constituencies in those states will have an advantage in lobbying at the committee level.¹⁶ For those interest groups who lack a direct constituency connection to important committee members, their task will be considerably complicated (Milbrath 1963). Bureaucracies, likewise, have constituencies (often the interests themselves), and these constituencies influence the preferences of the bureaucracy and help mediate the relationship between the bureaucracy and Congress (Banks and Weingast 1992).

Constituency relationships should therefore do two things for lobbying interest groups. They should increase the relative likelihood that an interest group will make the initial decision to lobby; and they should facilitate the subsequent lobbying activity, making it easier and potentially increasing a group's motivation to pursue political solutions to problems. Constituency relationships are the WD40 of political advocacy.

Hypothesis: Constituency-based relationships with members of Congress will increase the amount of lobbying in that venue, and improve the effectiveness of the efforts.

There are therefore two types of resources that impact a group's capacity for political activity: fiscal resources and human-capital resources, the latter of which

¹⁶ In this research I use 'state' rather than district as a proxy for constituency-based relationships to members of Congress because interest groups and corporations do not follow district lines (which are increasingly bizarre because of gerrymandering) – groups likely employ people or have members from multiple districts in a state.

contributes particularly to political capital. I expect that these two kinds of resources will boost each other. A group will enjoy the most access and influence if it possesses both the financial resources to engage in a potentially-multi-year effort and the constituency-based relationships that enable them to provide politically necessary information to legislators.

Hypothesis: Interest groups will be more efficient at lobbying, if they possess relatively more financial resources and consistency-based relationships with members of Congress.

POLITICAL TIME, INSTITUTIONS, AND INTEREST GROUPS

Interest group political activity has a final element – the element of “stickiness.” Lobbying, like many other political activities, is self-reinforcing, in terms of involvement, strategy, and effectiveness. Political arrangements often become deeply embedded over time because of “development,” rather than “choice;” these arrangements often stem from the “accumulation of self-reinforcing processes, ... [and] the temporal order of events or processes,” which can be crucial determinants (Pierson 2004, 16). Informal political arrangements like subsystems and the relationships therein, no less than formal arrangements, are the product of self-reinforcing processes and events. As groups participate in political activity they establish relationships, routines, and norms in conjunction with the other political actors involved in the policy arena; this is the very definition and nature of subsystems (Hansen 1991; Sheingate 2003). The political process is fundamentally based on repeated interactions between members of Congress, bureaucracies, and interest groups.

For interest groups and corporations who engage in lobbying, the activity is self-reinforcing; as they develop the capacity to lobby, they are more likely to engage in the activity at a higher level. Drutman (2015, 2) argues that, “corporate lobbying has reached

its modern pervasive position largely because corporate lobbying has its own internal momentum. In a word, lobbying is “sticky.” Hiring lobbyists and creating a government affairs department sets in motion a series of processes that, over time, collectively push companies toward more lobbying.” There is every reason to believe that this logic extends beyond corporations and applies to interest groups as well.

Because successful lobbying is built on long-term relationships (Drutman 2015; Hansen 1991; Milbrath 1963), lobbying self-perpetuates no matter the type of group engaged in the activity. A majority of interest groups may be set-up for the sole purpose of political advocacy, but building relationships is an activity that is time consuming and long-term. A group cannot set up on the Potomac and effectively establish its reputation with members of Congress over the course of a few weeks. Building a reputation as a reliable provider of policy and political information takes time and effort. As groups build the capacity for lobbying and develop the necessary relationships, they begin to find more reasons to do so, and over time this leads to additional investment in lobbying capacity, which leads to more aggressive and comprehensive lobbying, and so on (Drutman 2015). This means that groups already set-up for advocacy may begin to extend their reach and lobby on more policy issues than were encompassed in their initially stated goal. It also means that the groups who will be most effective at achieving their policy preferences are the groups who lobby again and again, year after year (Hansen 1991).

I argue that there is also an increasing role for established, trusted interest groups as relationships within Congress break down. Polarization has increased steadily over time (Poole and Rosenthal 2007; Sinclair 2006b; Theriault 2013), as has lobbying (Leech et al. 2005). Many have argued that as government grows, so does the role for special interests (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Benz et al. 2011; Leech et al. 2005). But

government is not only creating demand for interest groups as it produces more regulation and increases the reach of government. Polarized government also creates a space for trusted lobbyists to flourish because polarization creates an increase demand for the very brokering and negotiating skills that lobbyists possess. Partisanship has made committee work increasingly challenging for members, and has diminished their ability to come up with well-crafted policy solutions (Mann and Ornstein 2008). Lobbyists are able to grease the wheels and do the kind of trading and brokering that members of Congress seem to struggle with in the current environment. Lobbyists do not only provide informational subsidies, increasingly they provide ready-made policy solutions and perform the work of convincing policy-makers to support legislation (Andres 2009; Franklin 2014). In other words, lobbyists are beginning to do the work of committees, and they are allowed to do this work because they have established strong and lasting relationships with members and their staffs (Franklin 2014).

Hypothesis: Polarization not only increases the amount of lobbying in Congress, but also increases the importance and influence of interest groups in the legislative process.

WHY DO WE CARE?

Why should we care which groups are the most likely to lobby and where? Because we are in a pluralist system – it's essential to understand what kinds of groups are most likely to be successful in their lobbying efforts because these lobbying efforts skew our policy outcomes. Which groups are most successful at lobbying in Congress impacts which foods are cheapest at the register, and which foods become staples in the American diet. Lobbying efforts impact the nutrition guidelines issued by the USDA (Heid 2016); and they even impact the presidential race (Boudreau 2016). In order to

identify which policy outcomes are most likely, we have to understand the vulnerabilities in the system and which groups are advantaged where and why.

The steady increase of lobbying in response to polarization and the decline of the committee system also suggests that interest groups may be doing the work of Congress, rather than simply providing informational subsidies. This is remarkable because it indicates that interest groups are playing a more significant role in governance than we had previously thought. Interest groups are not only facilitating the process of information winnowing, they are now in the business of writing legislation and brokering its passage. This has powerful implications for who government is serving, and it presents significant challenges to the future of political science research. Sunlight laws are written with the purpose of exposing the inner-workings of Congress and providing more transparency to the legislative process. But if a significant portion of legislative work is being done outside of the Congressional halls, in offices, and on K-Street, then the laws intended to provide legislative transparency do us little good. The following chapters will illustrate where in government lobbying is occurring and what political factors drive it. I will show that money and connections, together, facilitate lobbying success, and that polarization drives interest group activity in a powerful way.

Chapter 3: The Business (as usual) of Washington: *Political and Institutional Influences on Corporate Lobbying Strategy*

Agricultural policy is one of the longest standing subsystems in American Politics. The first Agricultural Adjustment Act, passed in 1933, laid the foundation for a complex set of agricultural, conservation, and nutrition programs, many of which are still in existence today in some form. This web of policies, the subsidies, allocations, and regulations create a fertile environment for interest group activity.

Interest group activity in the agricultural sector, as in most others, is startlingly diverse. Any given group may utilize different lobbying strategies over time; and at any given point in time, a variety of groups are all using different lobbying strategies from one another. How do we explain this variation?

Within political science exists a vibrant conversation on interest groups, lobbying, and subsystems. However, political science has devoted relatively little attention to how the individual characteristics of interest groups impact their lobbying capacity and strategy. I test which characteristics of organizations and aspects of the current institutional environment impact lobbying decisions in the agricultural sector. I first consider why some firms choose to lobby when so many (the majority, even) do not. I then consider the degree to which firms lobby either the bureaucracy or Congress (this is what I mean by “strategy”), and how their attention shifts in response to changes in the political environment such as polarization. I also test how the characteristics of firms themselves constrain or enable lobbying efforts. By doing this, I provide a more nuanced perspective on lobbying efforts within the agricultural sector, and illustrate the need for a more aggressive economy-wide analysis in the future.

I focus on firms in particular because they are distinct in their motivations from other types of lobbying group. The legislative goals of nonprofits, producer associations, and local government may vary widely. However the ultimate goal of a corporation is profit maximization, rather than altruistic or collective (Alexander, Mazza, and Scholz 2009; Blau, Brough, and Thomas 2011; Hill *et al.* 2013; Hochberg, Sapienza, and Vissing-Jørgensen 2009; Mathur and Singh 2011; Mian, Sufi, and Trebbi 2010; Richter 2011; Yu and Yu 2012). By looking at firms, whose ultimate goal is profit maximization, the aim of this paper is to explain why groups who arguably have the same end-goals approach lobbying differently from one another. Given this, I ask: why do firms, who (presumably) all have the same objective of profit maximization, utilize different lobbying strategies from one another, and over time?

One possible explanation for why some firms chose to lobby, and why those firms that do lobby utilize distinct strategies from one another, is their set of individual traits. The relative availability of resources, for instance, is a reasonable base explanation for why some firms lobby and others do not. Once the decision to lobby has been made, additional firm characteristics may dictate strategy; perhaps firms with ties to a member of Congress in a relevant committee find their Congressional lobbying to be more effective than efforts aimed at the executive branch. Firms with a higher monetary value but without representational ties may lobby Congress and the Bureaucracy more evenly, or may even find it necessary to expend more effort lobbying Congress.

Organizational characteristics cannot, however, explain why a given firm often exercises different strategies over time. This may be better explained by looking at political and institutional features. One simple explanation might be that firms lobby Congress more actively during periods when Congress is considering more substantively important or a larger volume of legislation; and these firms might similarly lobby

bureaucracy more vociferously when a particular office is reviewing more important or a larger number of rules. Literature also suggests that interest groups may adjust their behavior in response to Congress division (Epstein and O'Halloran 1995; Huber and Shipan 2002; Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001; Moe 1984). This research explores these possible explanations of variation in lobbying strategy, both across firms and over time.

I begin with a discussion of where corporate lobbying fits in to the literature and what it adds to our understanding of policy construction. I lay out the puzzle in more detail, and explain the hypotheses and research rationale. I then present the research and discuss my findings.

LOBBYING STRATEGY: WHAT THEY DO, AND WHEN THEY DO IT

The background for research on lobbying begins with “The Logic of Collective Action,” by Mancur Olson (1971). The book argues that individuals have an incentive to free ride on the efforts others, particularly if the collective goal is to achieve public goods that are non-excludable. As Olson notes, firms, ultimately, have less trouble with collective action problems than other kinds of groups. This is evident from lobbying disclosure reports: the majority of lobbying in the United States is done by corporations and trade associations, rather than ideological and membership-based groups (Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty 2013; J. M. de Figueiredo 2004).

When firms lobby, they do so with the intention of profit maximization. Several studies have found that corporations engage in lobbying government, with great effect, to influence financial regulation and legislation and to otherwise increase gains in the marketplace (Alexander, Mazza, and Scholz 2009; Blau, Brough, and Thomas 2011; Hill et al. 2013; Hochberg, Sapienza, and Vissing-Jørgensen 2009; Mathur and Singh 2011; Mian, Sufi, and Trebbi 2010; Richter 2011; Yu and Yu 2012). Additionally, Alexander,

Mazza, and Scholz (2009) find that firms engaged in lobbying experience a return of over \$220 for every \$1 spent on lobbying.

Yet, in spite of the finding that firms who lobby experience an increase in profits, many firms do not lobby. These firms appear to rely on trade associations to accomplish the bulk of their political advocacy (this is evident both through the relatively large number of firms are inactive in lobbying, and the proliferation of highly active trade associations who work on their behalf). Only a limited set of firms, generally those with higher revenue, choose to go beyond what can be accomplished through trade associations (Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathur and Singh 2011). Once a firm does decide to become involved in politics by lobbying, it must make strategic decisions regarding how to best expend resources and achieve desired ends.

Holyoke (2003b) argues that groups will want to lobby in more sympathetic venues (legislature, courts, or executive branch), and will engage in pro-forma lobbying in venues where the cards are stacked against them.¹⁷ Within Congress, lobbyists generally target issue relevant committees, rather than initiating broad, institution-wide efforts (J. M. de Figueiredo and Richter 2013; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998, 1999). In other words, lobbying groups will try to maximize their utility through venue shopping and targeting.

Following from the conventional wisdom that suggests that groups lobby with the intention to influence committees (J. M. de Figueiredo and Richter 2013; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998, 1999), evidence suggests that when groups enjoy strong constituent ties to

¹⁷ Lobbying directed toward Congress and the bureaucracy are generally highly correlated (Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty 2013), meaning that the extent to which venue shopping is visible is most obvious as the relative amount of lobbying directed at each branch of government, and it is this that differs over time. It is important to note that groups may, of course, also lobby agencies independently of Congress, as agencies address regulatory issues over extended time periods, often years after Congress has finalized a particular piece of legislation.

a legislator's district, they will pursue a combined grassroots and direct lobbying campaign, regardless of legislator position (Hojnacki and Kimball 1999).

Political conditions on the Hill also impact lobbying strategies for those groups who are attuned. Agenda space and conflict are two of the most fundamental elements of the political environment, and yet, they change continuously, demanding that lobbying organizations adjust accordingly (and frequently). The broader the conflict, and the more government attention that is paid to any particular issue, the more organizations will actively lobby (Leech et al. 2005; Schattschneider 1957).

Literature consensus therefore suggests that firm wealth (Mathur and Singh 2011), perceived venue "friendliness" (Holyoke 2003b), constituent ties to members of Congress (Hojnacki and Kimball 1998), and the relative attention to an issue on the Hill (Leech et al. 2005), are the elements that together combine to impact interest group strategies. This leaves the question: what makes a venue sympathetic to a lobbying firm? Why and when does a firm lobby Congress, the bureaucracy, or the executive?

LOBBYING STRATEGY: ADVANCING THE THEORY

Literature on venue shopping between Congress, the bureaucracy, and the executive, has thus far focused on interest groups writ large. However, firms who engage in political behavior are, themselves, worthy of study independent from their lobbying counterparts of the nonprofit and advocacy persuasion. Business interests comprise the majority of lobbying groups, and they are distinctly profit-driven in their efforts (Drutman 2015). I expand on the current literature regarding firm lobbying strategies, and specifically lay out those general conditions under which firms find it advantageous to lobby one governmental institution over another.

While firm wealth is a significant hurdle to entry when it comes to political activity (Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathur and Singh 2011), there is no reason to predict that it alone will determine in which venues firms enjoy the most lobbying success. Political Action Committee contributions, for instance, appear to have minimal impact on policy outcomes (Milyo, Primo, and Groseclose 2000). However, I argue that firm wealth (measured here as revenue), when combined with constituency-based relationships to members of Congress, make firms more successful in their lobbying efforts.

These constituency-based relationships are not as “natural” to firms as they are to other kinds of interest groups. While interest groups are often composed of “grassroots memberships” that tie them to legislator constituency groups (Hojnacki and Kimball 1999), firms must cultivate a grassroots constituency from their employees, stock holders, retirees, and the communities in which their offices are located (Baysinger 1984). When firms are successful in doing this and have the resources necessary to translate these constituency-based relationships into lobbying on the Hill, I predict that they will find their lobbying efforts in Congress to be more successful, thus reducing the need for lobbying in other venues (the bureaucracy and Congress).

Hypothesis 1: Constituency-based connections to legislators on relevant committees, when combined with necessary resources, will reduce the amount of lobbying that a firm will engage in.

These organizational characteristics (firm wealth and legislative connections) may help explain the variation we see in lobbying strategy between different firms at any given time, but they do not explain why any firms change their strategies over time. One possibility is the ad hoc explanation: firms change their activity over time in response to the substantive issues being considered. This is an absolute certainty, but not a systematic

explanation. However, both bureaucratic literature and agenda setting literature suggest that there is a more systematic dynamic between Congress and the Bureaucracy, which we might explore: the relative scope of conflict in the agenda and the resulting principal-agent relationship. The second variable of interest in this paper is, therefore, Congressional polarization.

Literature suggests that when the “conflict space” is expanded and a large number of interests become active in the policy arena, it becomes more challenging for any one group to achieve their desired legislative outputs (Drutman 2015). Researchers argue that attention is a self-reinforcing cycle, in which as more interest groups pay attention to an issue, even more interest groups will begin to pay attention to that same issue; in short, they bandwagon (Leech et al. 2005). However, self-reinforcing, or bandwagoning, attention is not the only way that the conflict space can be expanded. Substantive policy conflict between the parties and between interest groups creates another kind of conflict expansion: substantive conflict. Substantive conflict, like conflict between interest groups, expands attention to the issue and typically leads to additional lobbying (Schattschneider 1957). I argue that the continually increasing polarization in Congress is leading to an inevitably widening conflict space and reduced Congressional capacity for legislation (Mann and Ornstein 2008). The increased conflict and reduced capacity of Congress allows interest groups to increasingly push their legislative agendas, act as mediators and negotiators, and offer policy solutions. And, while lobbying budgets are not zero-sum, I expect that a drastic increase in lobbying in one venue will inevitably lead to some reduction in other venues as interest groups re-calculate how to allocate budgets that are not unlimited.

Hypothesis 2: Polarization will lead to an increase in lobbying activity in Congress, and as a result, will reduce lobbying efforts in the bureaucracy and the White House.

As a direct counter point to this hypothesis, bureaucratic literature argues that ideological conflict has a distinct impact on the agencies involved in an issue area by expanding or restricting their freedom to legislate through rulemaking.¹⁸ Bureaucratic literature suggests that when the two chambers of the legislature are of the same party (unified), but the executive branch is controlled by the opposite party, legislators are more likely to use statutory controls over the bureaucracy (Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001). In other words, they will write more detailed legislation, giving the bureaucracy less discretion over the implementation process. The opposite is true when legislators have less capacity (Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001). In other words, when the two chambers are divided, the bureaucracy will have more discretion for implementation because the legislature may be unable to agree on more detailed legislation. They effectively “pass the buck,” as it were, to the implementing agency. This logic, when extended, leads to the conclusion that organizations will need to lobby the bureaucracy far more during periods of divided Congress than they would under unified conditions in the legislature. I therefore test the effect of a divided Congress on lobbying behavior as well.¹⁹

Hypothesis 3: Interest groups will lobby the bureaucracy more heavily during periods of divided Congress, and less heavily during periods of unified Congress.

THE DATA

In order to test these hypotheses, I combine Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) data with data from the Compustat Database (both are described in detail shortly), to create an original time series cross sectional database of lobbying firms.

¹⁸ Because bureaucratic rules carry the force of law, bureaucracies can be considered to legislate as effectively as Congress does.

¹⁹ The correlation between the average polarization in Congress and whether or not Congress is divided is 0.493. This level of colinearity is acceptably low, and allows me to use both measures in the same model.

The original LDA of 1995 required lobbying reports from any organization spending or earning more than \$10,000 in a six-month period on lobbying the federal government; the legislation has since been updated to cover organizations that spend more than \$3000 on lobbying activities during a given quarter (Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance 2013). While these disclosure reports are limited in what they contain, it provides useful quantifiable measures on lobbying activity, including the issue area interests lobbied in, the number of lobbyists they hired, the institution the lobbyists targeted, and the total amount of money an organization spent on lobbying efforts in a given quarter.

The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) has compiled and cleaned all registered lobbying expenditures that have been disclosed through the LDA. This cleaning includes name disambiguation, and excludes legal expenditures or other non-lobbying expenditures. However, relatively recent institutional rule changes have affected the structure of the data in ways that must be accounted for when performing analysis.

Analysis for this research begins with the year 1998 and extends through the year 2013. However, prior to 2008 lobbying interests were required to report semi-annually, rather than quarterly. To account for this, a dummy variable was created for the law-change in 2007 and beginning in 2008.

This provides me with a cross-sectional time series data set of lobbying firms from 1998-2013. I then matched this set of lobbying firms to a dataset downloaded from WRDS KnowledgeBase Compustat database. The Compustat dataset includes historical descriptive information (headquarter location and revenue, among other things) on stocks from both active and inactive companies from the NYSE, NYSE MKT, NASDAQ and Arca exchanges. Because firms were named inconsistently in the lobbying data (a function of how firms fill out their reporting forms), I hand-matched the two datasets,

resulting in a combined data set including 277 unique publicly traded firms who reported lobbying in the agriculture sector over the 15 year time period. The unit of analysis is firm year, yielding 988 observations.

Between 1998 and 2013 lobbying reports increased steadily, across all institutions. The below graph illustrates that the number of reports made by firms during that time span, by institution. It is important to note that the number of reports nearly doubles in 2008, as new reporting requirements went into effect. I do control for this change in reporting requirements in the regression analysis that follows.

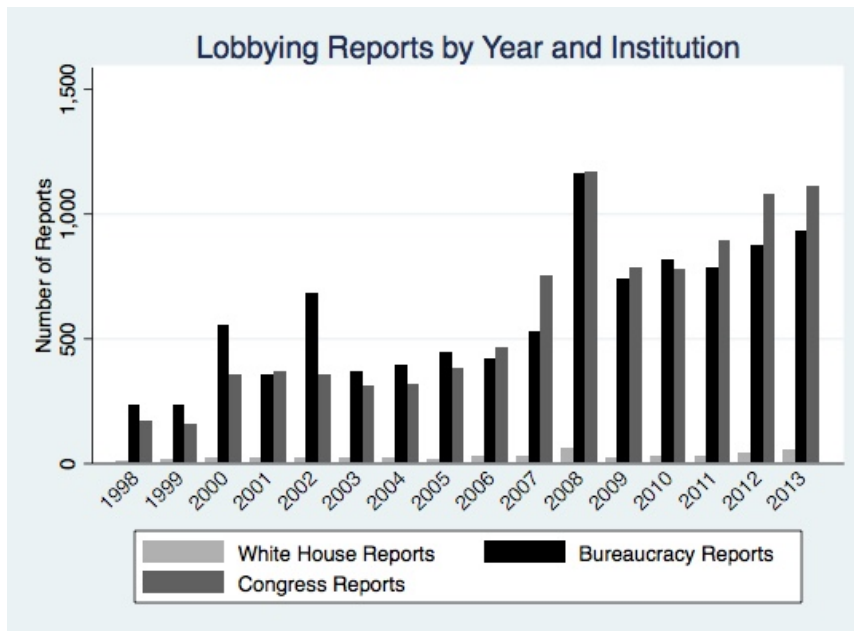


Figure 1: Firm Lobbying Reports by Institution and Year

METHODS

In order to test the hypotheses enumerated above, I perform a negative binomial regression on the cross sectional, time series data described here (Table 1). The dependent variable is the number of times a firm reported lobbying Congress, the

bureaucracy, or the White House, in a given year.²⁰ Lobbying the White House includes those groups who reported lobbying “White House,” “Joint Chiefs of Staff,” and “Vice President’s Office.” A group has lobbied Congress if they reported lobbying either the “US Senate or the US House of Representatives.” Finally, lobbying the bureaucracy is considered lobbying any other agency. Agencies include the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Food and Drug Administration, and many others. Negative binomial is appropriate, as the distribution on the dependent variable is non-normal. Most groups lobby somewhat inconsistently, and often lobby relatively little when they do report lobbying (meaning that the data is skewed). Figures 2 through 4 illustrate this skewedness by showing histograms of the number of firms that file just one or two reports over the 15 years, and the very few number of firms who file many more reports during that same time period.

Among the universe of firms that reported lobbying, the mean number of lobbying reports that a firm filed for lobbying Congress in a given year was 10, with the minimum number being 0 and the maximum number being 84. The mean number of reports that a firm filed for lobbying the bureaucracy during the same time period was also 10 and the minimum 0, but the maximum was 104. The White House saw much less lobbying activity, with the mean number of reports at only .5 (most firms reported 0 lobbying in the White House), the minimum being 0, and the maximum being 15 reports.

²⁰ A new lobbying report can be triggered by hiring a new lobbyist; lobbying on a new bill; a new filing quarter; or lobbying a different agency or branch of government.

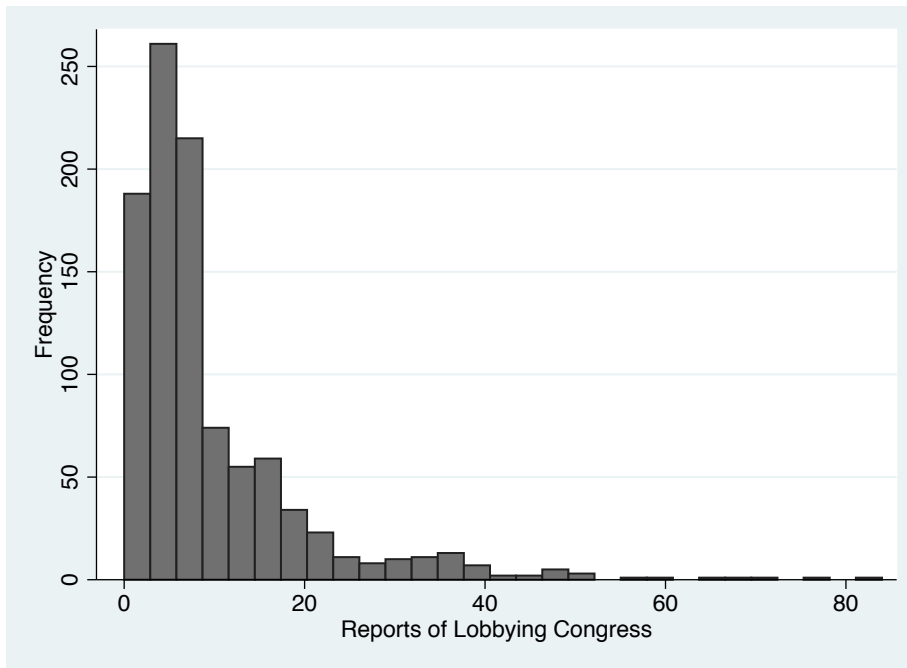


Figure 2. Histogram of Firm Lobbying Reports Filed for Congress

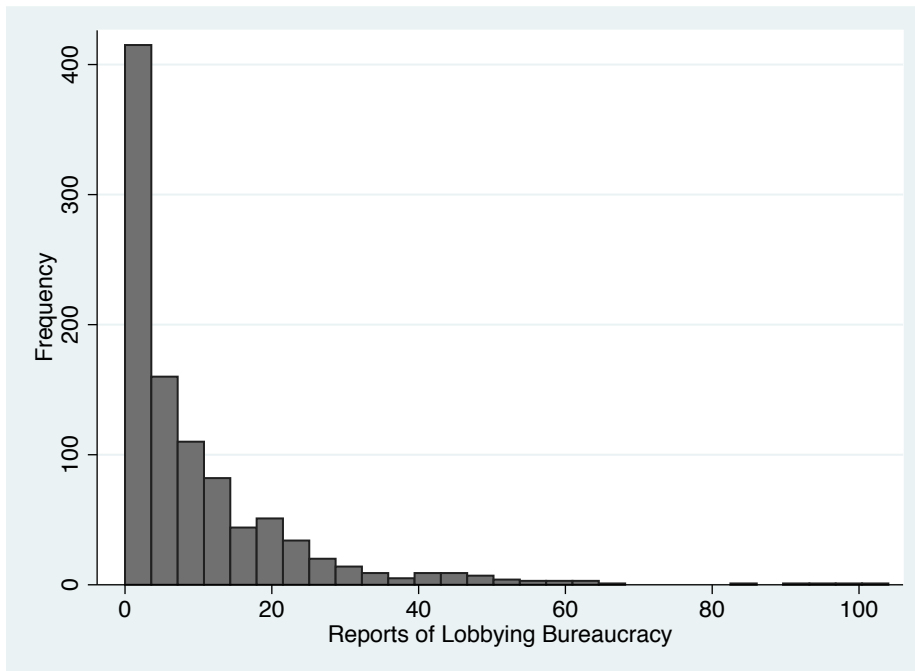


Figure 3. Histogram of Firm Lobbying Reports Filed for Bureaucracy

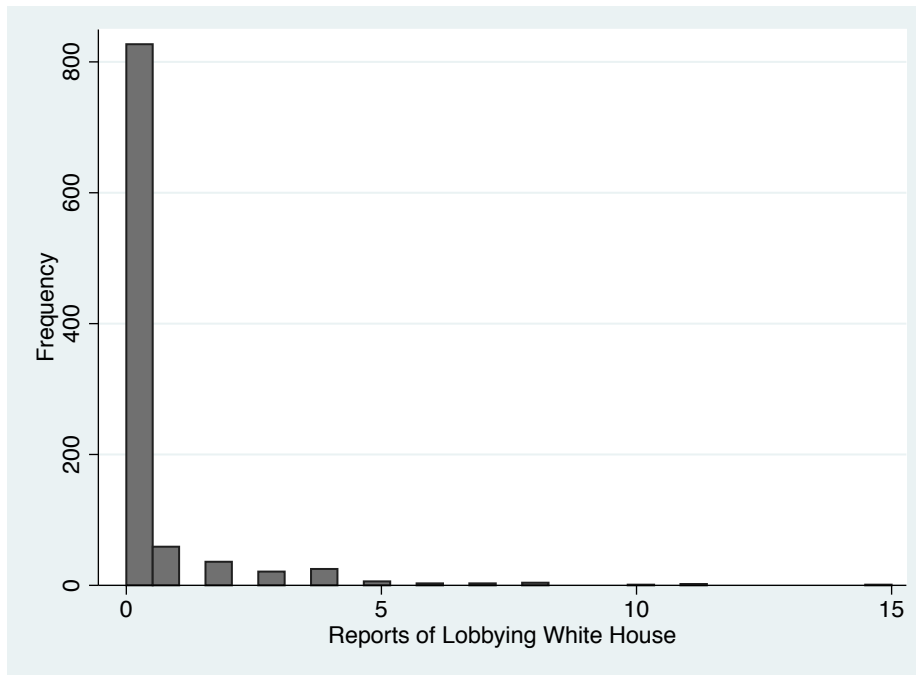


Figure 4. Histogram of Firm Lobbying Reports Filed for White House

Independent variables include the number of groups lobbying in the Agricultural arena in any given year, ranging from 31 to 104 groups, and the number of hearings on agriculture bills in Congress in a given year (ranging from 10 to 69) (Comparative Agendas Project: United States n.d.). These two factors are used as proxies for relative crowding of the agenda space and attention to the issue area at any given time.²¹ Congressional polarization is measured as an average of Rosenthal and Poole's House and Senate polarization means on the first dimension (2015). I also included a measure of divided Congress since the bureaucracy literature specifies division rather than polarization. Polarization and Congressional division are not correlated, because as Figure 5 illustrates, the average polarization score in Congress has steadily increased over time, without regard to the unification or division of Congress.

²¹ Lobbying on particular bills is severely underreported, and was not required until 2008. It is therefore not possible to account for precisely how many groups lobby on any given issue.

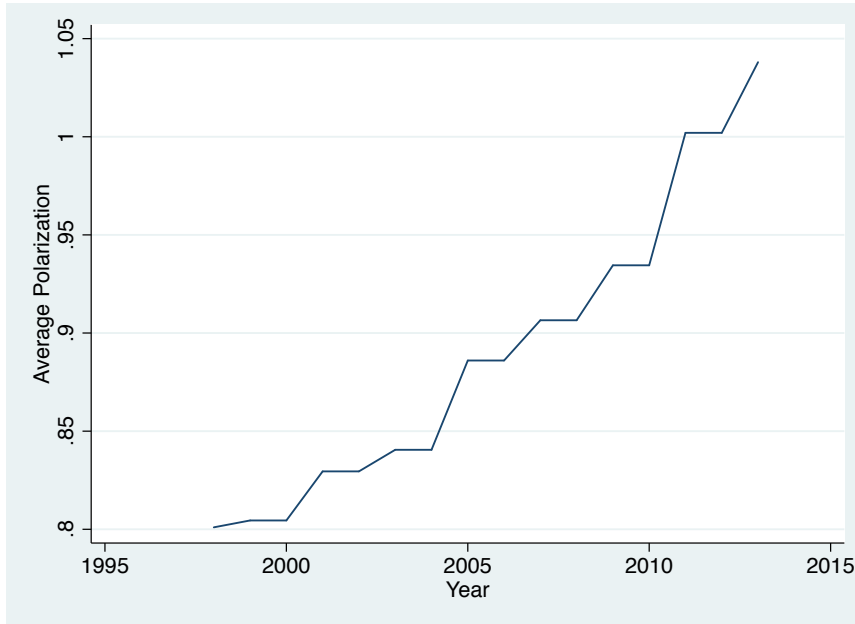


Figure 5: Average of Polarization in the House and Senate over time

Organizational capacity is measured by revenue as reported in Compustat, divided by 1,000 (to make the number less unwieldy). Another variable is the number of representatives on relevant committees that a firm can claim to be a constituent of, based on the location of a firm's headquarters (retrieved from Compustat). I consider relevant committees to be the Agriculture Committee, the Appropriations Committee, the Budget Committee, and Party Leadership. I also include an interaction term between firm revenue and firm location (congressional connections measure).²² This is intended to account for the possibility that firms who are both wealthy and particularly well connected may have more influence and power than other firms.

²² The interaction term is the firm revenue (divided by 1000 for a smaller number), multiplied times the number of "constituency connections" a firm has to members of Congress on relevant committees.

	Congress	Congress	Bureaucracy	Bureaucracy	White House	White House
Revenue, Connection Interaction	1.000 (-0.000)	---	1.0004* (0.0004)	---	1.0002 (0.0002)	---
Congressional Connections	1.001 (0.001)	1.000 (-0.0004)	0.976 (-0.025)	0.986 (-0.014)	0.954 (-0.047)	0.962 (-0.039)
Polarization	11.379** (2.432)	11.293** (2.424)	0.577 (-0.549)	0.511 (-0.671)	1.263 (0.234)	1.348 (0.299)
Divided Congress Dummy	1.004 (0.004)	1.004 (0.004)	0.978 (-0.022)	0.980 (0.021)	1.074 (0.072)	1.075 (0.072)
Revenue	1.000 (-0.000)	1.000 (-0.0004)	0.999 (-0.001)	1.001 (0.001)	1.007** (0.007)	1.008** (0.008)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.000 (0.0003)	1.000 (0.0003)	0.999 (-0.001)	1.000 (-0.0001)	1.005 (0.005)	1.005 (0.005)
Number of Congressional Hearings	1.002 (0.002)	1.002 (0.002)	0.995 (-0.005)	0.995 (-0.005)	0.986 (-0.014)	0.986 (-0.014)
Lobbying Congress	---	---	1.013 (0.013)	1.012** (0.012)	1.002 (0.002)	1.002 (0.002)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.015** (0.015)	1.015** (0.015)	---	---	1.038** (0.037)	1.038** (0.037)
Lobbying White House	1.024 (0.024)	1.024 (0.024)	1.132 (0.124)	1.134** (0.126)	---	---
2007 Law Change	1.279** (0.246)	1.279** (0.246)	1.123 (0.118)	1.138 (0.129)	0.374** (-0.984)	0.368** (-1.000)
Constant	0.309* (-1.175)	0.315* (-1.155)	3.519 (1.258)	3.556 (1.269)	0.389 (-0.944)	0.345 (-1.063)

Table 1: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Firm Lobbying Strategy

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 988

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Notably, firm revenue is not normally distributed, as Figure 6 illustrates.

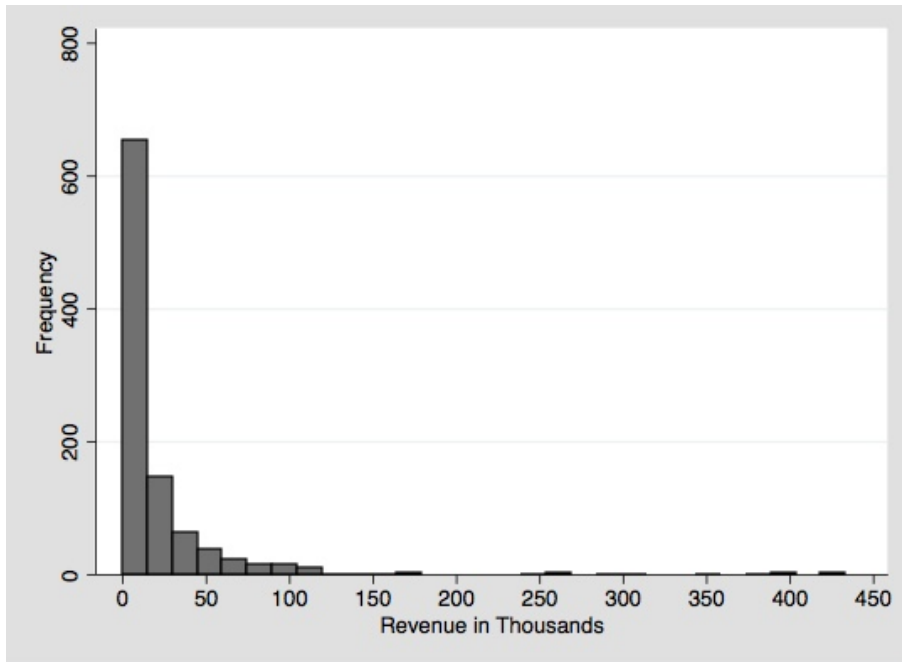


Figure 6: Histogram of Firm Revenue, in Thousands

The mean firm revenue is just 21.5 thousand, but the maximum firm revenue is 433.5 thousand. I therefore split the dataset along the mean and run the regression for firms at and below the mean (“small firms”), and separately for firms above the mean (“large firms”). Firms below the mean include Kellogg, Hershey’s Horizon Organics, and Land O’ Lakes. Firms above the mean include CocaCola, Tyson, McDonalds, and Walmart. ConAgra is an example of a firm that falls above the mean some years, and falls below it others.

	Congress	Bureaucracy	White House
Revenue, Connection Interaction	1.003+ (0.003)	0.994* (-0.006)	0.995 (-0.005)
Congressional Connections	0.992 (-0.008)	1.013 (0.013)	1.007 (0.007)
Polarization	2.600 (0.955)	1.951 (0.669)	0.063 (-2.763)
Divided Congress Dummy	1.112 (0.106)	0.931 (-0.071)	1.317 (0.276)
Revenue	1.005 (0.005)	1.006 (0.006)	1.064 (0.062)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.000 (-0.0002)	0.996 (-0.004)	1.005 (0.005)
Number of Congressional Hearings	1.005* (0.005)	0.991** (-0.009)	0.994 (-0.001)
Lobbying Congress	---	1.021** (0.020)	0.999 (-0.001)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.013** (0.013)	---	1.044** (0.043)
Lobbying White House	1.029** (0.029)	1.080** (0.077)	---
2007 Law Change	1.540** (0.432)	0.960 (-0.040)	0.359* (-1.025)
Constant	1.339 (0.292)	1.840 (0.610)	1.695 (0.528)

Table 2: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Small Firm Lobbying Strategy

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 733

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

+ Significant at the 0.10 level

	Congress	Bureaucracy	White House
Revenue, Connection Interaction	1.000 (-0.0001)	1.001** (0.001)	1.000 (0.0001)
Congressional Connections	0.998 (-0.002)	0.893** (-0.113)	0.969 (-0.031)
Polarization	148.313** (4.999)	0.049* (-3.022)	27.638 (3.319)
Divided Congress Dummy	0.823 (-0.194)	1.109 (0.085)	0.786 (-0.240)
Revenue	0.999 (-0.001)	0.999 -0.001	1.003 (0.003)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.003 (0.003)	1.005 (0.005)	1.004 (0.004)
Number of Congressional Hearings	0.997 (-0.003)	1.004 (0.004)	0.983 (-0.017)
Lobbying Congress	---	1.009* (0.009)	0.999 (0.001)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.013 (0.013)	---	1.038** (0.038)
Lobbying White House	1.002 (0.002)	1.210** (0.191)	---
2007 Law Change	0.950 (-0.051)	1.718** (0.541)	0.393* (-0.934)
Constant	0.028 (-3.573)	23.009** (3.136)	0.067 (-2.698)

Table 3: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Large Firm Lobbying Strategy

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 259

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

+ Significant at the 0.10 level

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that Polarization clearly increases lobbying in Congress. While it might be tempting to believe that this is a time trend – polarization is going up over time, and lobbying in Congress is increasing over time – it is not a time trend. If it were a time

trend, then polarization would also be significant in predicting the increase in lobbying in the Bureaucracy and White House, since lobbying has increased over time in these venues as well.

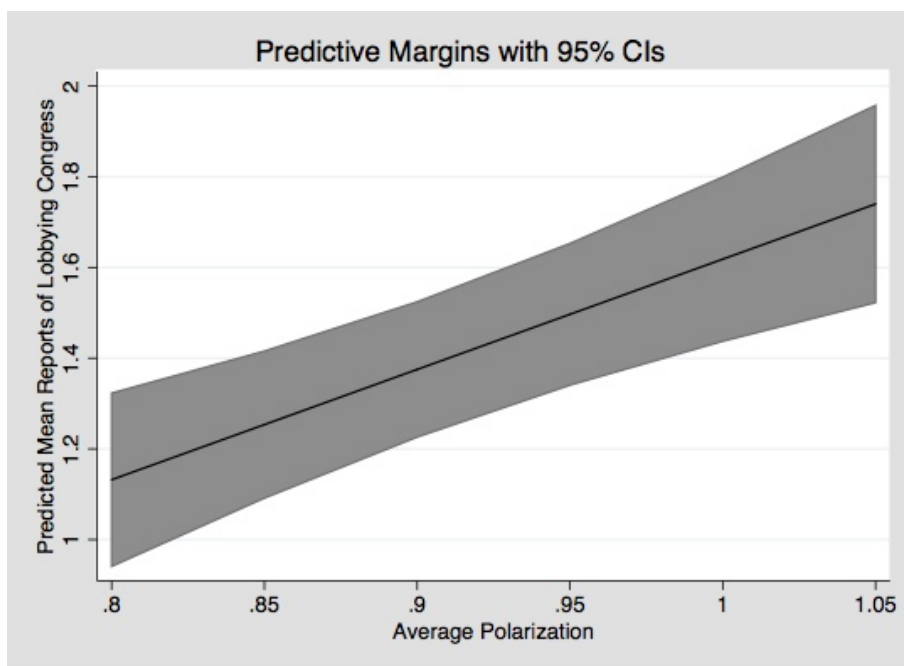


Figure 7: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Congress

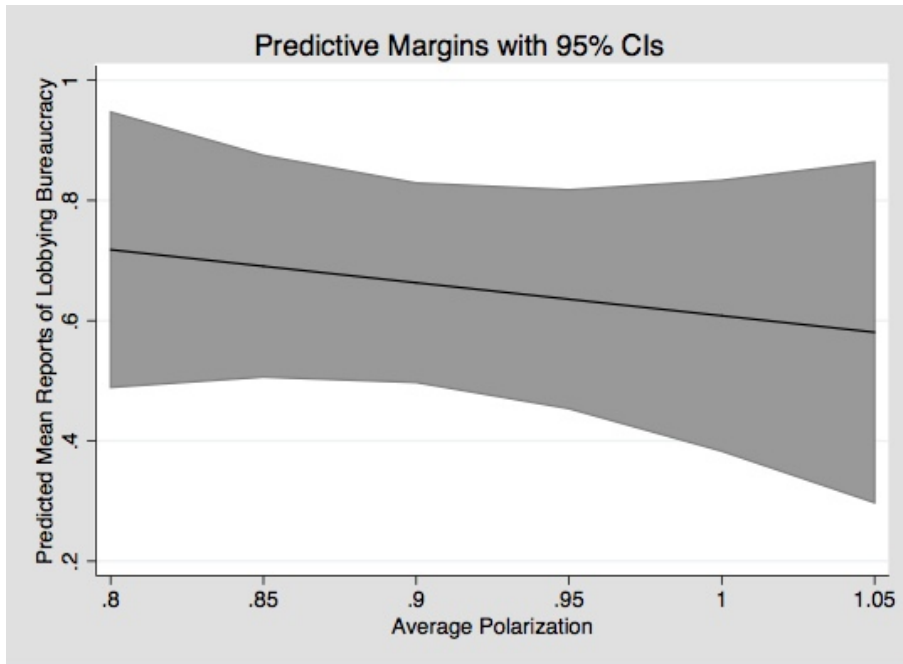


Figure 8: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Bureaucracy

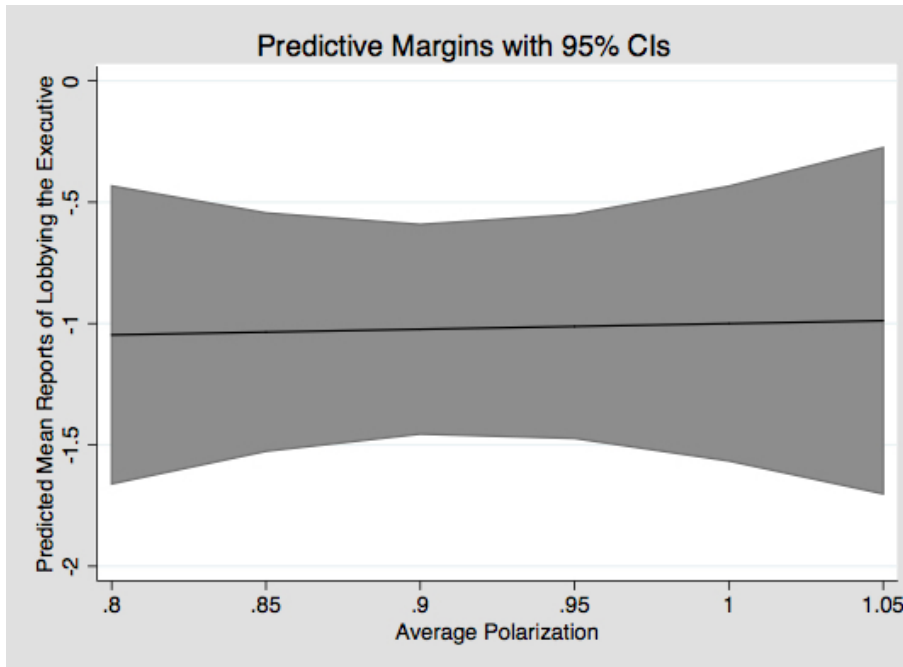


Figure 9: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying the White House

In support of Hypothesis 2, Figure 7 shows the clear relationship between increased polarization and increased lobbying in Congress; while Figures 8 and 9 show no relationship (and a slightly negative trend in the case of lobbying bureaucracy).

In contradiction to Hypothesis 1, Table 1 also indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between the Revenue and Location Interaction. However, as Figure 10 illustrates, the confidence interval widens enormously as the revenue and location interaction term gets larger.

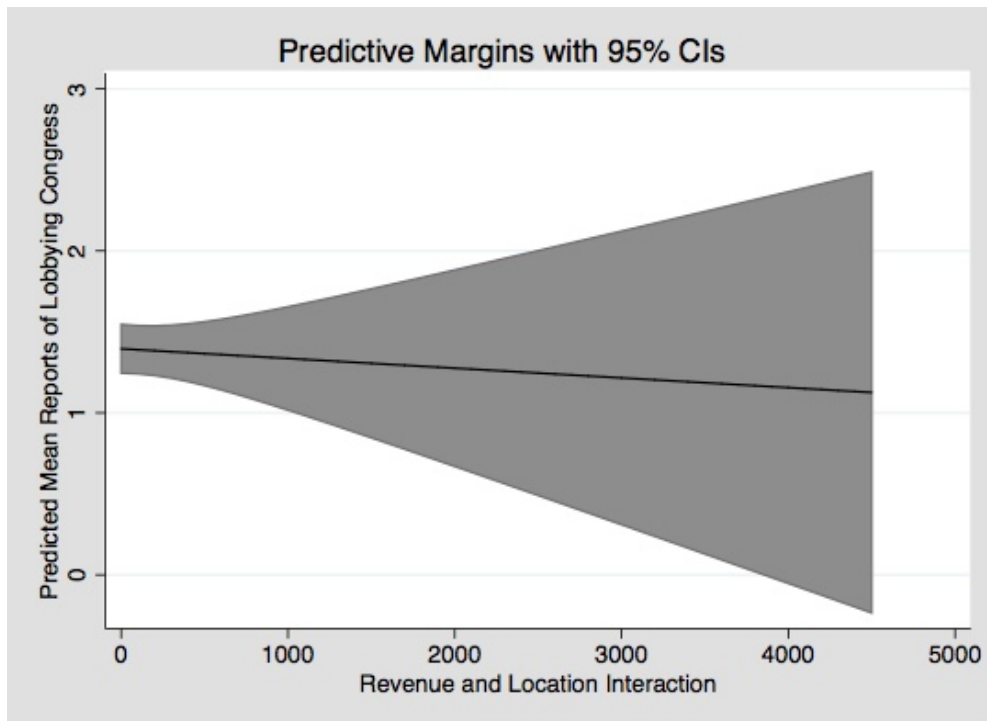


Figure 10: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying Congress

Tables 2 and 3 provide a more nuanced picture of the effects of polarization, and of the interaction between revenue and location, on lobbying. Table 2 indicates that polarization

does not have a significant effect on the lobbying decisions of smaller firms. However, the revenue and location interaction term does have somewhat more of an effect.

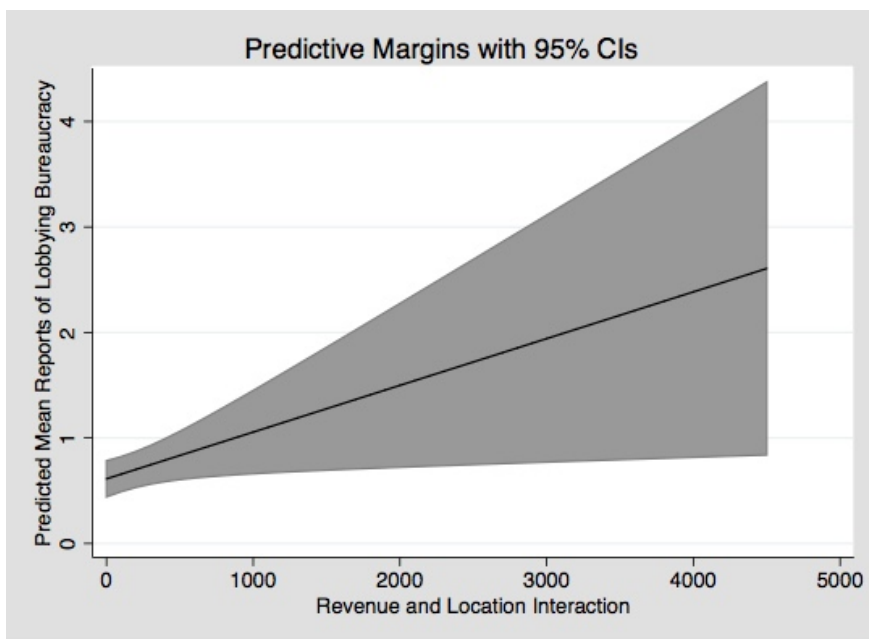


Figure 11: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy

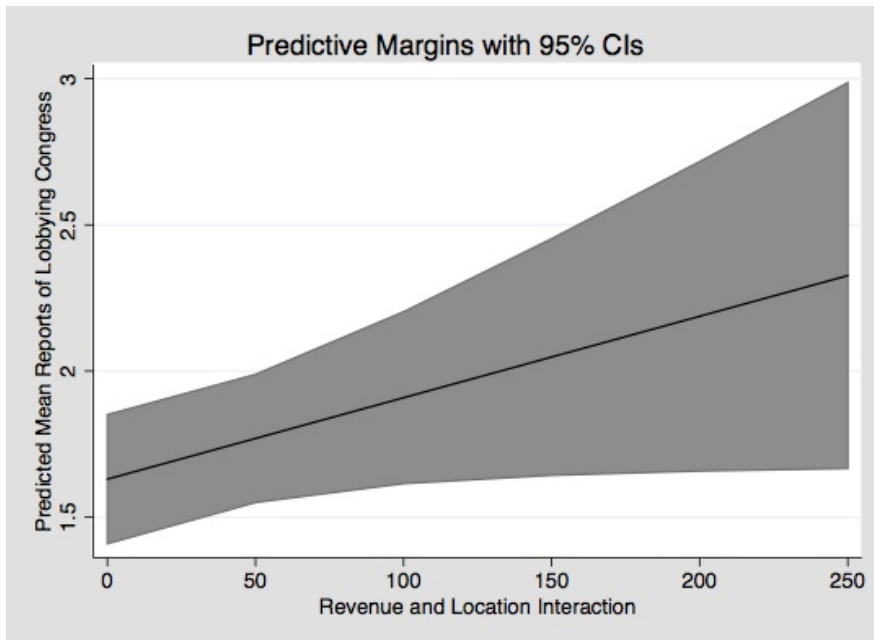


Figure 12: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying Congress for Large Firms

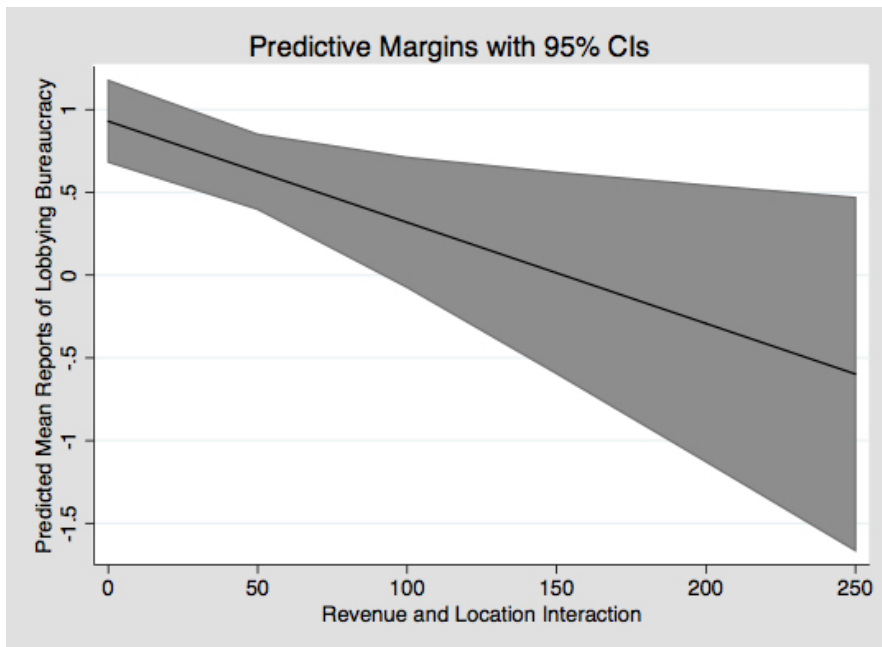


Figure 13: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Small firms

Tables 2 and 3 also provide a clearer test of Hypothesis 1, which predicted that constituency-based connections to legislators on relevant committees, when combined with necessary resources, will reduce the amount of lobbying that a firm will engage in. Figure 12 indicates that, among small firms, there is a positive relationship between lobbying in Congress and the interaction of revenue and location. Figure 13 illustrates the negative relationship, for small firms, between lobbying the bureaucracy and the revenue and location interaction term. Having a combination of constituency-based connections to members of Congress and relatively high revenue (within smaller firms) is associated with an increase in lobbying in Congress and a decrease in lobbying in the bureaucracy. But, do large firms behave similarly?

As Table 3 indicates, a larger revenue-location interaction term does not result in more lobbying in Congress; however, as Figure 14 shows, it does result in increased lobbying in the bureaucracy. I will suggest why this might be in the discussion section.

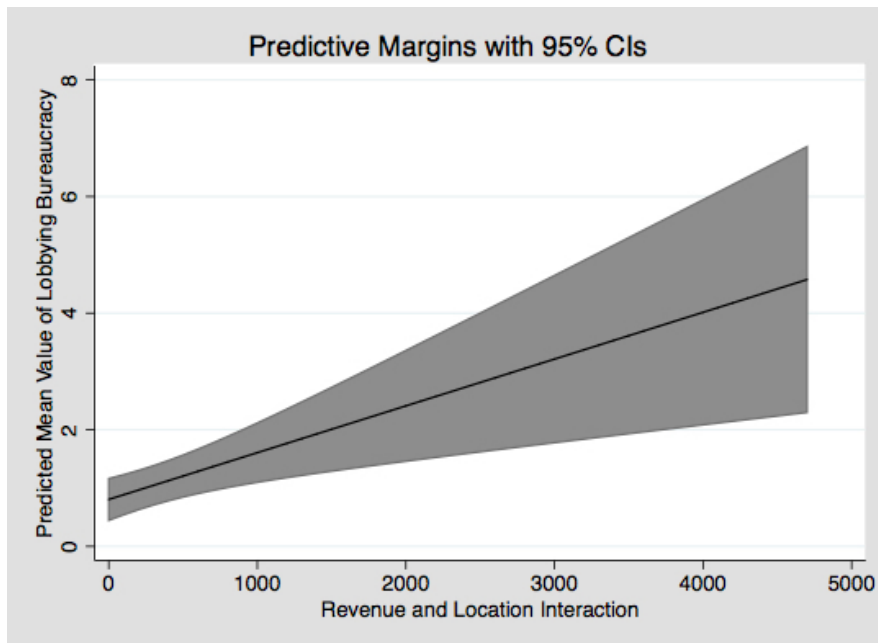


Figure 14: The Predicted Effect of the Interaction Between Revenue and Location on Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Large Firms

Polarization is also important in determining large-firm strategy. Tables 15 and 16 illustrate that, for large firms, as polarization increases it drives up lobbying in Congress, and drives down lobbying in the bureaucracy.

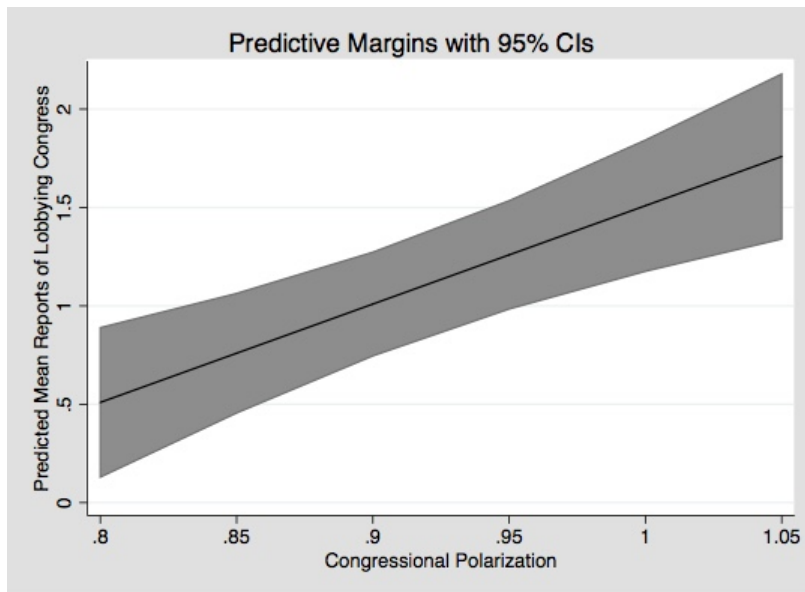


Figure 15: The Predicted Effect of Congressional Polarization Reports of Lobbying Congress for Large Firms

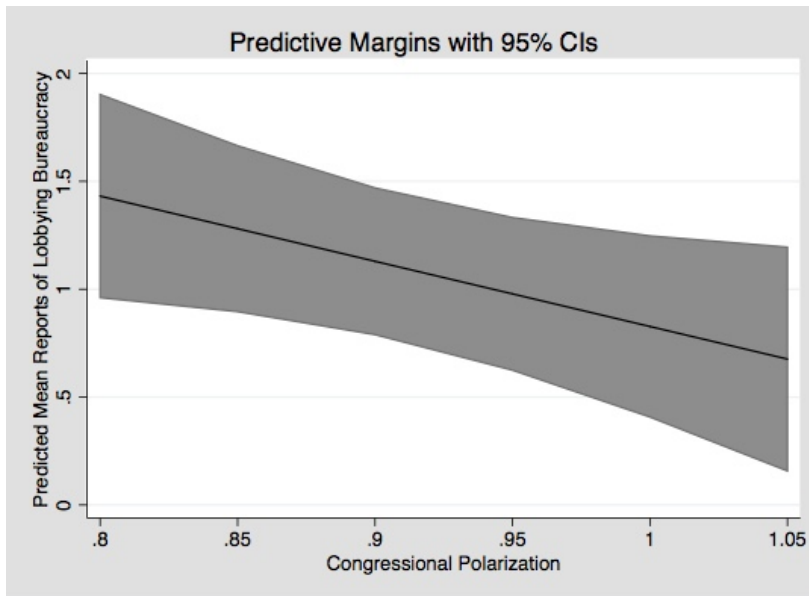


Figure 16: The Predicted Effect of Congressional Polarization Reports of Lobbying the Bureaucracy for Large Firms

Hypothesis 3, which predicted that interest groups will lobby the bureaucracy more heavily during periods of divided Congress, and less heavily during periods of unified Congress, does not find support in any of the regressions. The presence of a divided Congress appears not to affect lobbying strategy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Corporate lobbyists clearly respond to the political environment in which they work. However, their responses are contingent on the characteristics of the firm they represent. Larger firms are considerably more responsive to political polarization than smaller firms; and as Congressional polarization has increased, large firms have ramped up their lobbying in Congress and reduced it in the bureaucracy. Smaller firms, on the other hand, are more likely to lobby Congress, and less likely to lobby the bureaucracy, when they have some combination of revenue (and therefore a larger number of constituents they can claim to speak for) and geographical ties to relevant members of

Congress. These distinctly different priorities speak to the limitations of lobbying firms. The discussion that follows operates under the assumption that firms are rational enough to utilize the lobbying strategies that they find to be the most effective.

The difference between small and large firm lobbying indicates that firms with fewer resources are more tightly bound to traditional lobbying techniques that rely on constituency-based connections. Smaller firms are more restricted in their capacity for influence, since firm wealth is highly predictive of the ability for firms to engage in lobbying activity (Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathur and Singh 2011). Those firms who can make the argument that they represent a constituency-group find it more effective to rely on members of Congress in relevant committees than on bureaucrats. This lobbying strategy looks very similar to the strategies described in previous literature – lobbying groups generally focus on committees, and particularly on those members with whom they have a constituency-based relationship. (J. M. de Figueiredo and Richter 2013; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998, 1999).

However, for larger firms who are less constrained, lobbying can become more about strategy than about survival. Congressional polarization is widening the conflict space in new, unprecedented ways and is tearing apart the traditional coalitions that have bound the agricultural subsystem, in particular (A. Sheingate 2013). As polarization is chipping away at Congressional Capacity, large firms are directing more of their lobbying energies to Congress and away from the bureaucracy. This suggests that firms that have the resources to expand beyond their direct Congressional connections see a polarized Congress as an increased opportunity to insert their preferred legislative provisions and to shape the direction of public policy. If we believe that firms act even somewhat rationally, then the conclusion must be that polarization is creating a new space for corporate influence in politics.

Why does it matter that polarization is creating opportunity for increased corporate influence in the Agricultural subsystem? Because, agricultural policy touches nearly all areas of American life. Food and agricultural policy impacts everything from public health crises like diabetes and heart disease; natural security, for instance, the number of young people who are physically fit enough to serve in the military; diplomacy, consider the food for peace program; and education, research shows that children who are malnourished are less able to perform in school and more likely to end up in trouble (Brock and Sparrow 2016). Pluralism demands that corporate lobbying, like other kinds of lobbying, be allowed; but there is reason to worry when it appears that corporations are ramping up their lobbying efforts at the same time that Congress appears to have less capacity for self-regulation.

Chapter 4: Polarization and Congressional Lobbying

In an era of polarized politics, it is more important than ever to understand the role of lobbying in public policymaking. As conflict between and within the parties makes compromise difficult (Black and Black 2007; Brewer 2005; Poole and Rosenthal 2000; Sinclair 2006a), lobbyists are finding new ways to insert themselves in to the process of negotiation (Andres 2009; Franklin 2014). However, political scientists know surprisingly little about exactly how polarization affects lobbying behavior, in part because this is simply uncharted territory.

This chapter delves in to food and agricultural lobbying behavior across the broad array of lobbying group types: from firms, to interest groups, to unions and local governments. In particular, it asks: does polarization increase lobbying across all types of groups, or is this finding exclusive to firms? And, does Congressional polarization create space for a larger number of groups to lobby, or does it dampen the desire of interest groups to get involved?

To answer these questions, this chapter uses data from lobbying on food and agricultural policy. The food and agricultural policy subsystem presents a perfect case to answer the questions presented above. First, the agricultural policy arena had been, until quite recently, highly bipartisan; yet it now finds itself in the middle of a bitter partisan battle over government spending (Good 2014; Neely 2013; A. Sheingate 2013). This recent shift in subsystem dynamics presents the opportunity to look at the behavior changes wrought by sudden polarization. We have the opportunity to observe a distinct political shift that changes the lobbying environment for interest groups. Second, agricultural policy is substantively essential to American health, national security, and is a centerpiece of domestic politics (Brock and Sparrow 2016; Poppendieck 2011; Warren

2017). Agricultural policy presents, in this historical moment, a substantively vital natural experiment with regards to how polarization and lobbying interact to make public policy.

I begin with a discussion of polarization in politics and how subsystem conflict affects interest group behavior. By connecting these literatures, I propose a theory of increased lobbying intensity in Congress in response to polarization. I then present the research and discuss my findings.

POLARIZATION IN POLITICS

The United States is in a new era of increased polarization, in which liberals are becoming more liberal, and conservatives more conservative (Black and Black 2007; Brewer 2005; Poole and Rosenthal 2000; Sinclair 2006a). The distance between the parties, and between the members therein is wider now than it has been in recent memory. And this polarization is not only focused on issues that have been historically high salience like abortion or welfare. Research indicates that increasing polarization is leading to *conflict extension*: previously agreed upon issues are becoming newly polarized; new cleavages are forming where they did not exist before (Layman et al. 2010).

The formation of new cleavages is clearly visible in the agricultural policy space. The passage of the 2013 Farm Bill (the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013) was possibly the most bitterly partisan process in farm bill history, as hard line Republicans worked to the supplementary nutrition assistance program away from farm subsidies, or to strip SNAP down to bare bones at the very least (Neely 2013; A. Sheingate 2013). And yet, or perhaps because of this bitter fighting, the 2013 farm bill was the 6th most heavily lobbied bill, in dollars, of that year (Top Bills: 2013 n.d.).

As the farm bill of 2013 illustrates – conflict over policy can potentially occur on two levels. First: conflict can occur between the parties and the extremes therein (polarization), and second: conflict can occur between interest groups who are lobbying for their preferred policy outcomes. But, is conflict between interest groups really what is occurring?

Subsystem literature tells us that, as there is more competition in a subsystem, it drives interest groups to become specialists (find niches) in order to secure a competitive advantage with other groups (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Browne 1990; Lowery et al. 2012). Interest groups are thus actually avoiding competition with each other.

Interest groups need resources to survive, and subsystem density puts a premium on those resources (Lowery et al. 2012). Instead of competing, they specialize. Within this literature there is conflict over the effect interest group crowding and specialization has on participation. Lowery et al. (2012) find that interest groups do specialize, but nonetheless their participation declines as the subsystem becomes more crowded. Others find that as government grows there is more room for interest group activity (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Benz et al. 2011; Leech et al. 2005), meaning that interest group participation need not decline, it only needs to specialize. Conflict between interest groups is therefore not conflict over policy outcomes, but rather, conflict over resources; a conflict that interest groups are largely able to solve by specializing.

But what about conflict caused by polarization? The effect of conflict caused by polarization on lobbying behavior is a surprising lacuna in political science literature. It is clear that political environment impacts lobbying behavior – from the intensity with which groups lobby to the kind of groups that lobby (Boehmke 2005; Dusso 2010; Plotnick and Winters 1990). Political environment, in these studies, includes dimensions such as a whether the government allows citizen initiatives (Boehmke 2005); the amount

of uncertainty regarding possible legislative outcomes (Dusso 2010); and the competitiveness of parties within the governing system (Plotnick and Winters 1990).

To counter these studies, bureaucracy literature argues that ideological conflict between the chambers of Congress will reduce congressional capacity to legislate, leading Congress to delegate more rulemaking authority to agencies. This literature suggests that when the two chambers of the legislature are of the same party (unified), but the executive branch is controlled by the opposite party, legislators are more likely to use statutory controls over the bureaucracy (Huber, Shipan, and Pfahler 2001). When the two chambers are divided, the bureaucracy will have more discretion for implementation because the legislature may be unable to agree on more detailed legislation; they effectively “pass the buck,” to the implementing agency. On the one hand, this logic implies that Congressional conflict would drive lobbying toward the agency (as the agency is given more authority); but on the other hand, polarization does not correlate highly with unified or divided government. Polarization increases steadily, while party control of Congress’s chambers has alternated periodically.

The literature explores party control of Congress, uncertainty over legislative outcomes, the intensity of lobbying, and the electoral competitiveness of parties. These environmental factors, while not measures of polarization, provide us with clues as to how polarization may affect lobbying behavior. If party competition and uncertainty appear to lead to more lobbying (Dusso 2010; Gray et al. 2015; Plotnick and Winters 1990), then it is reasonable to suppose that polarization might similarly do so.

Gray et al. (2015) predict that polarization will lead to increased lobbying, however, their findings are more complicated. They find that non-profit groups lobby more in response to polarization, but that for-profit groups lobby less in response to

polarization (Gray et al. 2015). For-profit interest groups are, Gray et al argue, not interested in becoming tarred with a party brush, they prefer to remain bipartisan.

But Gray et al.s findings are the state level. What about at the federal level? There is little research on the specific impact of polarization on for-profit advocacy at the federal level. However, we do know that politics in the US are highly polarized (Black and Black 2007; Brewer 2005; Poole and Rosenthal 2000); and that the majority of lobbying in the United States is done by corporations and trade associations, rather than ideological or membership-based groups (Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty 2013; J. M. de Figueiredo 2004). It does not, therefore, appear that polarization is dampening corporate enthusiasm for political advocacy. But is it increasing it? And is polarization increasing lobbying among other not-for-profit groups, as Gray et al (2015) assert?

This chapter expands upon the possibility of polarization driving lobbying behavior, and considers how different types of lobbying interest groups might respond to partisanship in different ways.

POLARIZATION DRIVES LOBBYING

While party competition and uncertainty appear to lead to more lobbying (Dusso 2010; Gray et al. 2015; Plotnick and Winters 1990), polarization and party competition are not the same. Competition is how likely each party is to win any given election, while polarization is the distance between the center and the most extreme members of the parties. However, one might speculate that party competition and polarization would function similarly, depending on how we conceive of polarization.

Polarization could, arguably be conceived of as adding to certainty, or diminishing certainty. Once an issue is polarized, presumably certainty is increased, in the sense that we, as constituents, are clear on where Republicans and Democrats each

stand on that issue. However, polarization, in the context of a competitive party system, would lead to highly increased uncertainty for politically active groups. In a system that is both competitive and highly polarized, as a new party gains control of the legislature, the legislative outputs sought by that party would be drastically different from those sought by the party formerly in control; thus creating potentially wild swings in policy, and high uncertainty for interested advocacy groups.

Uncertainty is not the only reason why polarization might drive increases in interest group activity. Andres (2009) argues that lobbyists serve as a conduit for indirect communication, bridging the ideological divide, and negating between the parties and members of Congress. Polarization increases Congressional reliance on the services of lobbyists.

The evidence in this chapter cannot distinguish between the motivations of reducing uncertainty or increasing influence, however, there is no reason why these goals should be mutually exclusive for an interest group. In both cases, polarization should drive a considerable increase in lobbying activity.²³

Hypothesis 1: Congressional polarization will increase lobbying in Congress.

But will polarization drive increase lobbying among all interest groups, or does it drive lobbying only among certain kinds of groups? Gray et al (2015) find that it does not increase lobbying among all groups. As noted, they find that for-profit interest groups lobby less in highly polarized state governments, than in less polarized state governments. Perhaps federal lobbying is different? If Andres (2009) is correct that lobbyists act as go-betweens in a divided government, and therefore have increased influence, then it seems reasonable that for-profit companies would have as much, if not

²³ By this, I mean an increase in the number of reports an interest group files for lobbying an institution in a given year. New reports may be triggered by hiring a new lobbyist; lobbying on a new bill; a few filing quarter; or lobbying a different agency or branch of government.

more, motivation to lobby under polarized conditions, give than firms may experience a return of over \$220 for every \$1 spent on lobbying (Alexander, Mazza, and Scholz 2009).

Further, the literature on interest group niches indicates that when interest groups face competition and conflict from other interest groups, they specialize to avoid direct competition for resources (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Benz et al. 2011; Leech et al. 2005). Perhaps interest groups are able to adapt similarly to polarization. It is possible that interest groups find ways to become more policy-content savvy to avoid larger political fights. Based on the argument that interest groups are finding additional influence under polarized conditions, I predict that *all* lobbying groups (both firms and not-for-profit interests) will increase their lobbying intensity in Congress.

Hypothesis 2: Congressional polarization will increase the amount of lobbying done in Congress by *both* not-for-profit interest groups and corporate groups.

This leads to the question: what does polarization do to lobbying in the bureaucracy? On the one hand, lobbying budgets, while likely not entirely inelastic, are likely not infinitely expandable. I predict that when groups devote more resources to lobbying in one institution, they will ultimately devote fewer resources to other institutions (such as the bureaucracy and the white house), either because they have achieved the majority of their policy goals through legislation and need only see it through to implementation (which should, theoretically, require fewer resources if the bureaucracy implements Congress's directions), or because they have not achieved their policy preferences in Congress and therefore have no hope of achieving them in the bureaucracy.

Hypothesis 3: Congressional polarization will lead to reduced intensity of lobbying in the bureaucracy and White House.

Congressional polarization will, then, lead to a lower intensity (measured by number of reports, per group) of lobbying in the bureaucracy and White House, but an increased intensity of lobbying in Congress. I hypothesize that polarization is creating a trade off of lobbying intensity, where Congress is receiving an increasing amount of attention as groups try to accomplish their legislative priorities.

THE DATA

In order to test these hypotheses, I combine Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) data with Poole and Rosenthal's DWNOMINATE polarization scores (2015), and several other measures of political environment such as a measure of divided congress (house and senate controlled by different parties), and the number of Congressional hearings on Agriculture, gathered from the Policy Agendas Project (Comparative Agendas Project: United States n.d.).

The original LDA of 1995 required lobbying reports from any organization spending or earning more than \$10,000 in a six-month period on lobbying the federal government; the legislation has since been undated to cover organizations that spend more than \$3,000 on lobbying activities during a given quarter (Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance 2013). While these disclosure reports are limited in what they contain, it provides useful quantifiable measures of lobbying activity, including the issue area interest groups lobbied in, the number of lobbyists they hired, the institution the lobbyists targeted, and the total amount of money an organization spent on lobbying efforts in a given quarter.

The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) has compiled and cleaned all registered lobbying expenditures that have been disclosed through the LDA. This cleaning includes name disambiguation, and excludes legal expenditures or other non-lobbying

expenditures. However, relatively recent institutional rule changes have affected the structure of the data in ways that must be accounted for when performing analysis.

Analysis for this research begins with the year 1998 and extends through the year 2013. Prior to 2008 lobbying interests were required to report semi-annually, rather than quarterly. To account for this, a dummy variable was created for the law-change in 2007, which took effect in 2008.

This provides a cross-sectional time series data set of lobbying interest groups from 1998-2013. There were a total of 2,679 interest groups who reported lobbying in Agriculture during this time period, and the unit of analysis is interest group by year, yielding a total of 10,77 observations.

Between 1998 and 2013 lobbying reports increased steadily, across all institutions. The below graph illustrates the number of reports made by interest groups during that time span, by institution. It is important to note that the number of reports nearly doubles in 2008, as new reporting requirements went into effect. I do control for the change in reporting requirements in the regression analysis that follows.

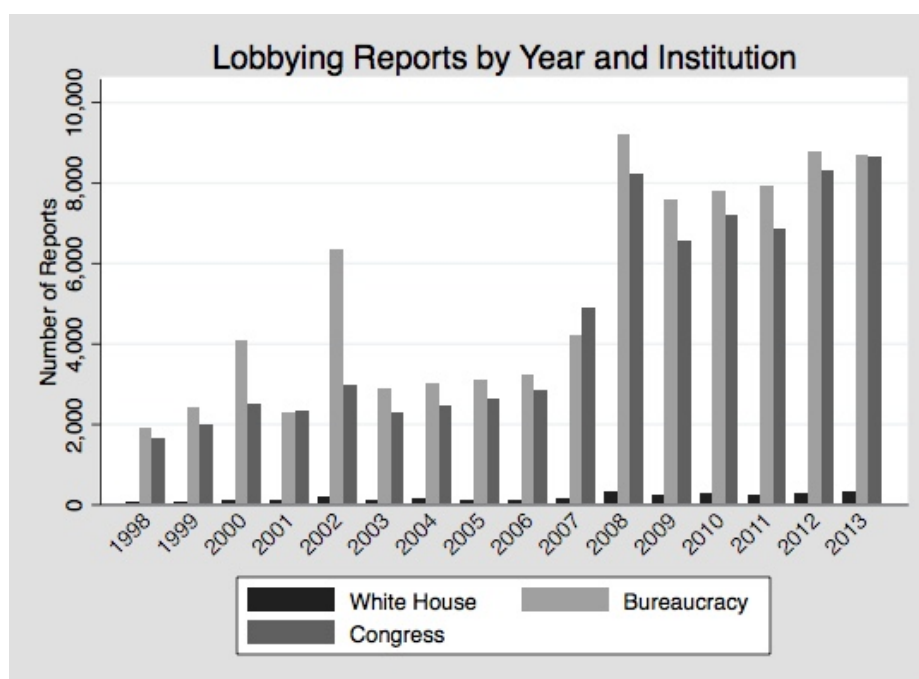


Figure 17: All Lobbying Reports in Agriculture by Institution and Year

METHODS

In order to test the hypotheses enumerated above, I perform a negative binomial regression on the cross sectional, time series data described here (Table 4). The dependent variable is the number of times a group reported lobbying Congress, the bureaucracy, or the White House, in a given year. All groups were hand coded according to type, and a 10% sample was blind coded using a multiple coder method.²⁴ 39% of the groups fall into the category of corporation / firm (3,872 groups), 54% of the groups are categorized as interest groups (5,488 groups), 6% are local government (603), and 1% are unions (114 groups). 73 individuals or groups were dropped from analysis (coded as

²⁴ Krippendorff's alpha inter-coder reliability scores are as follows: .768 for firms; .332 for nonprofits, originally a distinct code, which was subsumed under the category of "interest groups" because of this low score; .724 for "interest groups;" .716 for "local government;" 1 for "unions;" and -0.005 for "other," a category of 73 groups which was dropped from analysis. Krippendorff (2004) states that tentative conclusions are acceptable with a score of greater than .667, while a score of .800 is preferable. These scores for codes used here are generally nearer the .800 level, than the .667 level.

“other”), as those 73 lobbying individuals or groups are not useful to the analysis here.²⁵ The complete codebook can be found in Appendix A.

Lobbying the White House includes those groups who reported lobbying “White House,” “Joint Chiefs of Staff,” and “Vice President’s Office.” A group has lobbied Congress if they reported lobbying either the “US Senate or the US House of Representatives.” Finally, lobbying the bureaucracy is considered lobbying any other agency. Agencies include the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Food and Drug Administration, and many others. Negative binomial is appropriate, as the distribution on the dependent variable is non-normal. Most groups lobby somewhat inconsistently, and many groups lobby very little when they do report lobbying (meaning that the data is skewed). Figures 18 through 20 illustrate this skewness by showing histograms of the number of groups that file just one or two reports over the 15 years, and the very few number of groups who file many more reports during that same time period.

Among the universe of all groups that reported lobbying, the mean number of lobbying reports a group filed for lobbying Congress in a given year was 7, while the minimum was 0 reports and the maximum was 95 reports. The mean number of reports that a firm filed for lobbying the bureaucracy during the same time period was 8 and the minimum 0, but the maximum was 448 reports. The White House saw much less lobbying activity, with the mean number of reports at .8 (most firms reported 0 lobbying in the White House), the minimum being 0, and the maximum being 32 reports.

²⁵ The group “other,” includes individuals (21), countries (5), and groups that could not be classified (47) because there was no information available about them. For example, the following are included in this category: “8900 lines,” “Jim Bradshaw,” “EYT,” and “Network.”

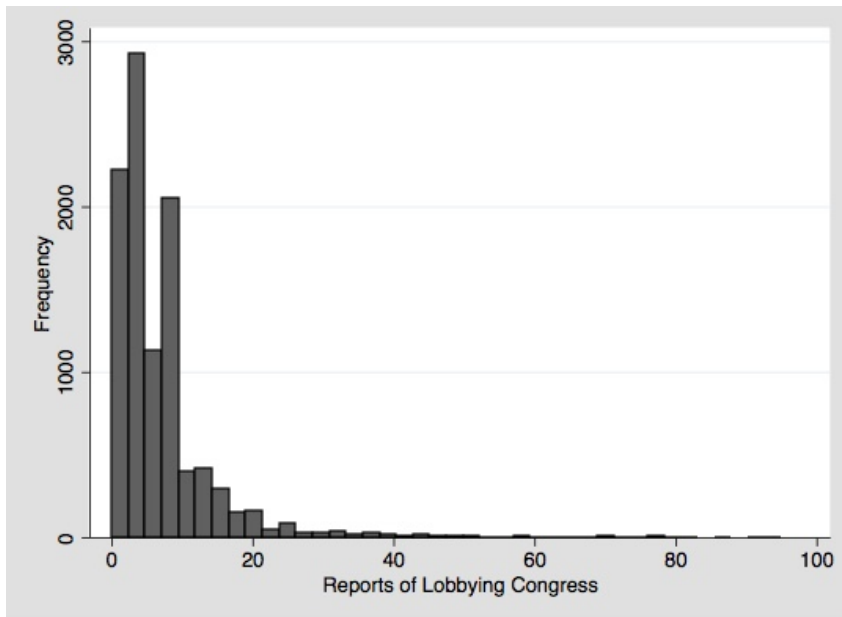


Figure 18. Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for Congress

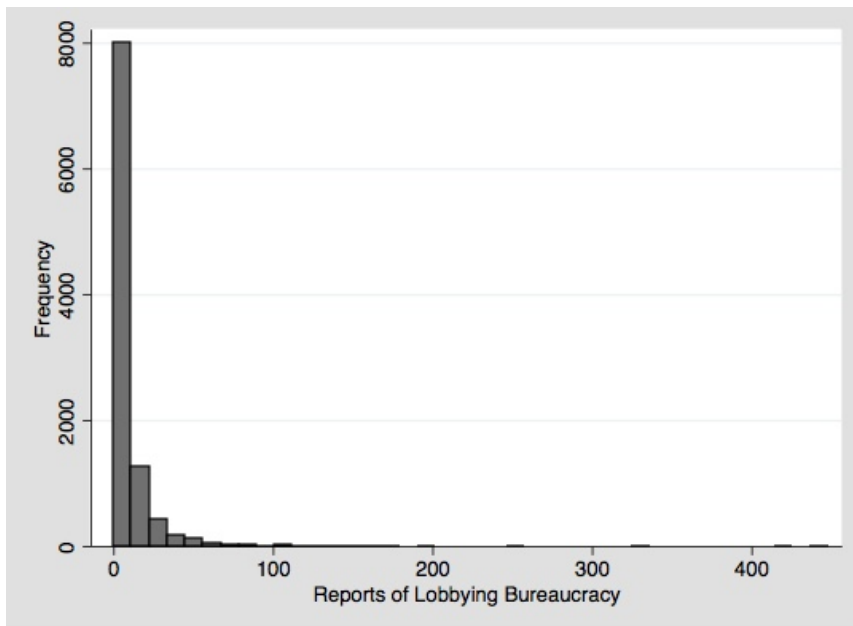


Figure 19. Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for Bureaucracy

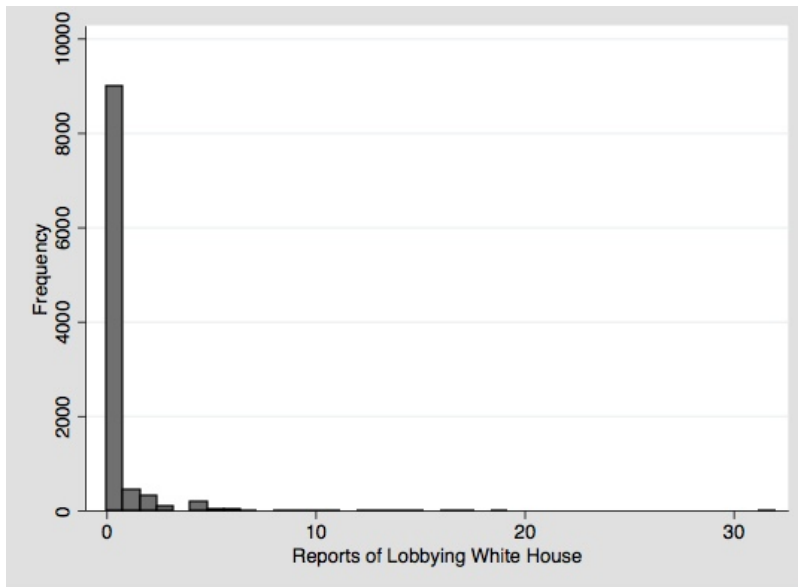


Figure 20. Histogram of All Lobbying Reports Filed for White House

I include group type as a factor independent variable, with “firms” as the base category, which allows for comparison of the lobbying intensity between different types of groups. Other independent variables include the number of groups lobbying in the Agricultural arena in any given year, ranging from 372 groups lobbying in a year, to a maximum of 908 groups lobbying; and the number of hearings on agriculture bills in Congress in a given year (ranging from 10 to 69) (Comparative Agendas Project: United States n.d.). These two factors are used as proxies for relative crowding of the agenda space and attention to the issue area at any given time.²⁶ Congressional polarization is measured as an average of Rosenthal and Poole’s House and Senate polarization means on the first dimension (2015). I also included a measure of divided Congress since the bureaucracy literature specifies division rather than polarization. Polarization and Congressional division are not correlated, because as Figure 5 (page 49) illustrates, the

²⁶ Lobbying on particular bills is severely underreported, and was not required until 2008. It is therefore not possible to account for precisely how many groups lobby on any given issue.

average polarization score in Congress has steadily increased over time, without regard to the unification or division of Congress. Finally, I include measures for the lobbying toward other institutions that a group did in a given year.

	Congress	Bureaucracy	White House
Polarization	3.040** (1.112)	0.359** (-1.026)	0.823 (-0.195)
Divided Congress Dummy	0.987 (-0.013)	1.063** (0.061)	1.090 (0.086)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.0002** (0.0002)	1.000 (0.0001)	1.001 (0.001)
Number of Congressional Hearings	1.002** (0.002)	0.997** (-0.003)	0.995+ (-0.005)
Lobbying Congress	--	1.006** (0.006)	1.002 (0.002)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.003** (0.004)	--	1.012** (0.012)
Lobbying White House	1.006 (0.006)	1.080** (0.077)	--
2007 Law Change	1.632** (0.490)	1.539** (0.431)	0.924 (-0.079)
5. Interest Groups	1.164** (0.152)	1.036 (0.036)	1.257* (0.229)
6. Local Governments	1.099* (0.094)	1.045 (0.044)	0.364** (-1.011)
8. Unions	0.893 (-0.113)	0.982 (-0.018)	1.225 (0.203)
Constant	1.480** (0.392)	4.759** (1.560)	0.637 (-0.451)

Table 4: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Lobbying Strategies, base category firms

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 10,077

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

+ Significant at the 0.10 level

I also run negative binomial regressions separately for firms only, and interest groups only. This allows me to compare the independent variables that affect firm lobbying intensity to those that affect interest group lobbying intensity.

	Congress	Bureaucracy	White House
Polarization	2.461** (0.900)	0.318** (-1.145)	0.725 (-0.321)
Divided Congress Dummy	0.982 (-0.018)	1.059+ (0.057)	1.011 (0.011)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.0003** (0.0003)	1.0002 (0.0002)	1.0003 (0.0003)
Number of Congressional Hearings	1.001 (0.001)	0.998 (-0.002)	0.993 (-0.007)
Lobbying Congress	--	0.998 (-0.002)	0.996 (-0.004)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.002* (0.002)	--	1.010** (0.010)
Lobbying White House	0.998 (-0.002)	1.067** (0.065)	--
2007 Law Change	1.742** (0.555)	1.756** (0.563)	1.117 (0.111)
Constant	2.314** (0.839)	5.089** (1.627)	1.155 (-0.144)

Table 5: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Interest Group Lobbying Strategy

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 5,488

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

+ Significant at the 0.10 level

	Congress	Bureaucracy	White House
Polarization	4.595** (1.525)	0.468+ (-0.759)	1.539 (0.431)
Divided Congress Dummy	1.005 (0.005)	1.057 (0.056)	1.126 (0.119)
Other Firms Lobbying	1.000 (-0.0004)	1.000 (0.0001)	1.001* (0.001)
Number of Congressional Hearings	1.003** (0.003)	0.995** (-0.005)	0.997 (-0.003)
Lobbying Congress	--	1.018** (0.018)	0.999 (-0.001)
Lobbying Bureaucracy	1.011** (0.011)	--	1.032** (0.032)
Lobbying White House	1.026** (0.025)	1.117** (0.110)	--
2007 Law Change	1.496** (0.403)	1.259** (0.230)	0.530** (-0.635)
Constant	1.030 (-0.030)	4.978** (1.605)	0.256 (-1.363)

Table 6: Incident Rate Ratios, Negative Binomial Regression Results for Firm Lobbying Strategies

Coefficients in parenthesis

N = 3,872

**Significant at the 0.01 level

*Significant at the 0.05 level

+ Significant at the 0.10 level

RESULTS

Table 4 shows that hypothesis 1 is correct, and hypothesis 3 is partially correct: polarization increases lobbying intensity in Congress, and drastically reduces it in the bureaucracy; however, polarization does not have a statistically significant effect on lobbying in the White House. While it might be tempting to believe that the relationship between polarization and lobbying in Congress is a time trend – polarization is going up

over time, and lobbying in Congress is increasing over time – it is not a time trend. If it were a time trend then polarization would also have a positive effect on lobbying in the Bureaucracy and White House, since lobbying has increased over time in these venues as well.

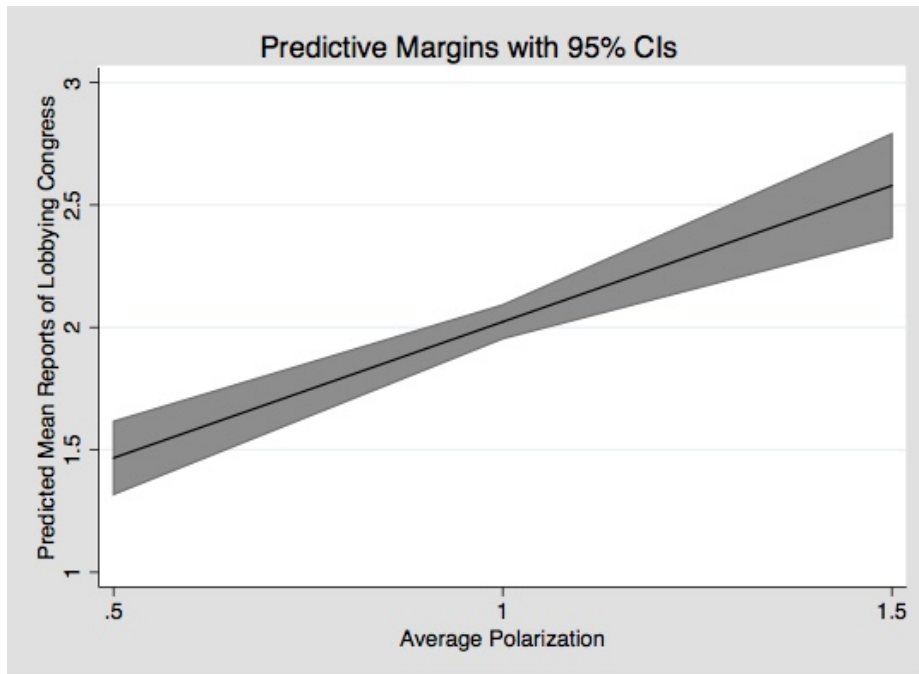


Figure 21: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Congress

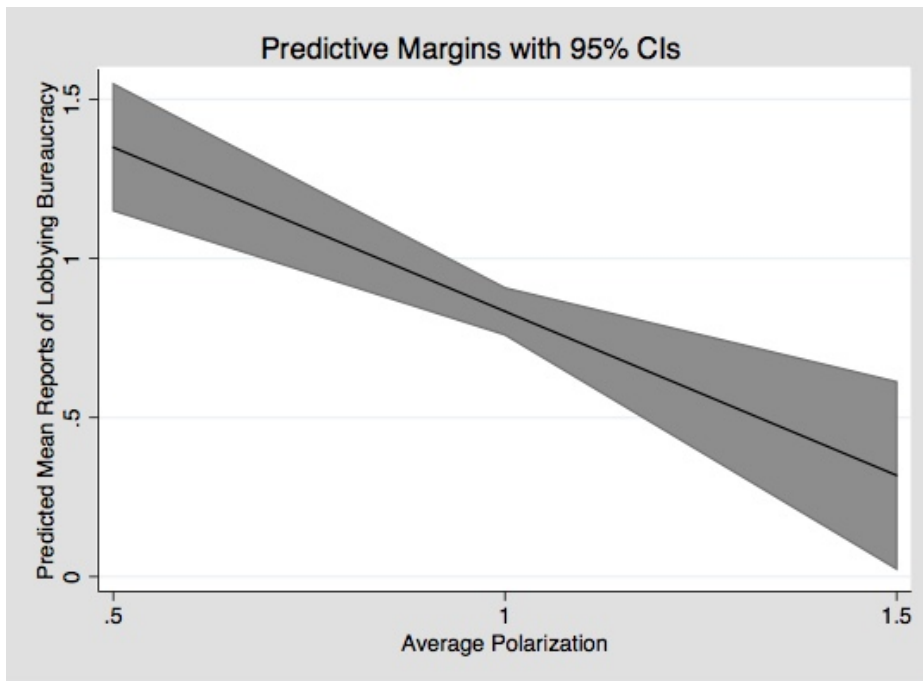


Figure 22: The Predicted Effect of Polarization on Reports of Lobbying Bureaucracy

The number of Congressional hearings in Agriculture has a small, but positive and significant effect on lobbying in Congress, and a correspondingly small and negative effect on lobbying in the Bureaucracy and White House.

Table 4 also demonstrates that both interest groups and local governments lobby Congress with a higher intensity than firms, but that local governments lobby the White House considerably less than firms. Nonprofit organizations lobby the bureaucracy less than firms; whereas unions have no statistically significant differences from firms in their behavior.

Interestingly, as bureaucratic scholars predict, a divided Congress (where the House and Senate are controlled by different parties) does have a positive and significant effect on lobbying the bureaucracy. The caveat to this is that, as Tables 5 and 6 show, this effect is actually true only for interest groups, and not for firms; who appear to be less

responsive, in general, in terms of altering their lobbying in the bureaucracy based on political environment.

In particular, Tables 5 and 6 serve to test hypothesis 2: that Congressional polarization increases lobbying in Congress for both interest groups and firms. Tables 5 and 6 illustrate that polarization has a positive and significant effect on lobbying in Congress for both firms and interest groups; and a negative and significant effect (though only at the .10 level for firms) when lobbying the bureaucracy.

The results of the negative binomial regressions, then, show that polarization increases then intensity of lobbying in Congress and has a negative effect on lobbying in the bureaucracy. This effect is found to be true for both firms and interest groups. The results also show that interest groups lobby with a relatively higher intensity than firms in Congress, but are not statistically different from firms in their behavior toward the bureaucracy or White House.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Interest groups, of all types – from corporate to nonprofit, are responding to Congressional polarization by increasing the intensity of their lobbying efforts. This behavior strongly suggests that either or both of the following are true: polarization in the agricultural subsystem is creating uncertainty that demands a response from interest groups; or polarization in the agricultural subsystem is creating the opportunity for interest groups to have a larger impact on public policy.

Taken in concert with Chapters 3 and 5, we can conclude that both of these statements are true in degree. Polarization is wrecking havoc on the compromises between rural and urban lawmakers that are so historically essential to the construction

and passage of farm bills, creating both high uncertainty and new opportunity (Good 2014; Neely 2013; A. Sheingate 2013).

If competition between parties increases lobbying because of increased uncertainty (Plotnick and Winters 1990), then it is reasonable to conclude that the combination of competition between Democrats and Republicans for control over government, paired with high polarization within these parties, is creating an environment of extreme uncertainty. This extreme uncertainty means that interest groups can no longer necessarily rely on long-standing compromises. As deficits run high and conservative legislators argue for splitting nutrition titles away from the farm bill, urban and rural interests may be pitted against one another for benefits and programmatic funds. Yet, there is also opportunity; groups who have historically not been included in the farm bill may see this as an opportunity to insert their preferred policy solutions a cheaper or more efficient alternatives.

Importantly, this is true for both general interest groups and for corporate firms/interest groups. Though literature suggests that polarization may decrease corporate lobbying (Gray et al. 2015), these findings indicate that corporations, like other interest groups, are responding to polarization in federal government with a considerable increase in the intensity of their lobbying efforts in Congress.

As these results show, the increased intensity of lobbying Congress is clearly coming at the expense of lobbying at the administrative level. This leads to the question: how does a shift in lobbying toward Congress and away from the bureaucracy affect policy outputs? Answering this question would require both an analysis of how delegation to the bureaucracy has changed over time (has Congress begun to delegate less, thus reducing the necessity of lobbying bureaucracies?), and in-depth interviews with interest groups to clarify how they perceive and respond to winning and losing

during the regulatory process. Future research should consider these kinds of questions when looking at the trade-offs interest groups make between lobbying in Congress and at the regulatory level; because it is clear from this data that trade-offs are indeed made.

Chapter 5: He Said, She Said: *The Power of Interest Group Negotiations*

“Many years ago there was a senator from Alabama, by the name of Howell Heflin, who served on the Ag committee throughout his tenure. He saw a lot of farm bills come and go, and for three consecutive farm bills, when we would meet in the Senate, the first day of debate he would give his opening speech. He would always say “Mr. Chairman, I don’t know why we’re here meeting yet, because we can’t talk about the farm bill because all the Ag lobbyists haven’t decided what they want yet in the farm bill!” And everybody would always laugh, and they knew the speech was coming, but he was right on target. Ultimately, members of Congress, when it comes to Agricultural policy, sort out opinions from their various friends in the Ag community, from organizations like ours. They’re seeking the groups’ input”²⁷

Congress is (supposed to be) in the business of mediation and negotiation. Members must negotiate policy between and amongst themselves, as well as in the wider world – considering the demands of public opinion, interested organizations and firms, and even concerns related to trade agreements. The process of negotiation between members of Congress and the wider world, also known as lobbying, is one that political scientists have long been attuned to, and have studied extensively. The Agricultural policy arena in particular, is widely considered to be an especially fertile area for study. It has a long policy history, beginning in the 1930s, and has expanded in scope and importance since. Indeed, the agricultural subsystem has been the subject of many subsystem and lobbying studies in political science because of this history, stability, and uniquely cooperative nature (Browne 1988, 1995; Hansen 1991; Sheingate 2003, to name a few). And indeed, those I interviewed often saw the Agricultural policy area as an example of unique cooperation, negotiation, and good policy process. Yet in the same

²⁷ Author interview with Chuck Conner, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Washington DC, August 2014.

breath, many interviewees also noted the ways that polarization and uncertainty were changing the political landscape.

Chapter three of the dissertation examined corporate lobbying in agriculture and noted two particularly important phenomena within corporate political advocacy: that financial resources and human capital, in the form of constituency-based relationships with members of Congress, appear to amplify each other when lobbying Congress, and reduce the need to lobby bureaucracy; and that polarization appears to be increasing lobbying efforts in Congress. Chapter four found similar results. This chapter digs deeper into the possible motivations driving lobbying strategies, and extends the findings beyond corporations to other types of interest groups. This chapter also explores the path dependent nature of political advocacy and how polarization may be shaking existing relationships while simultaneously further entrenching the role of interest groups in policy making.

Path dependency is essentially inertia: history and past decisions shape the possible choices and decisions we make in the future (Pierson 2004). A thing set in motion tends to continue in the same direction unless interrupted or redirected by an external source. This is true not just of individuals, but also of organizations and government institutions. As previously noted, the agricultural subsystem has a unique reputation as stable and conciliatory; it is an environment in which lawmakers have historically worked across party lines and where unique coalitions have flourished. However, polarization is rapidly changing relationships in Congress and destabilizing even the more long-standing and cross-cutting policy arenas (Good 2014; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008; A. Sheingate 2013). Polarization is a disruptive force in the historical path of the agricultural subsystem. This chapter considers how that disruption affects relationships inside the subsystem, and how that might affect legislative

outcomes. I argue that as long-standing coalitions between urban and rural lawmakers are shaken, interest groups increasingly insert themselves into the policy process.

The chapter will begin by discussing the current literature around lobbying, path dependence, and polarization. I then offer a theory advancing the argument that polarization represents a disruption in the path of the agricultural subsystem, and set forth hypotheses to this effect. I present evidence from interviews in support of this argument, and conclude by offering a discussion of the implications.

STICKINESS, DISRUPTION, AND POLARIZATION

Paul Pierson describes the institutional stickiness of government, saying, “despite massive social, economic, and political changes over time, self-reinforcing dynamics associated with collective action processes – especially high start-up costs, coordination effects, and adaptive expectations – mean that organizations will have a strong tendency to persist once they are institutionalized” (2004, 34). Lee Drutman, similarly describes behavioral stickiness within corporations, “once a company starts lobbying, political activity has an institutional stickiness that keeps companies politically engaged, despite ebbs and flows in the political agenda” (2015, 8).

Both the Drutman and Pierson quotes above point to the notion that the relationships between government and interest groups are self-reinforcing, and that over time they become more entrenched, weathering political and cultural changes. As lobbyists form relationships, day after day, week after week, they essentially become an informal part of the government apparatus as information providers and feedback mechanisms (Austen-Smith 1993; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Segal, Cameron, and Cover 1992). In fact, the bulk of current lobbying efforts are focused on “education, agenda setting, information gathering, interpretation, prediction, and managing uncertainty,”

rather than keeping government out of corporate affairs (Andres 2009, 5). As this quote illustrates, lobbying is not a one-way flow of information, nor is it solely focused on swaying legislative outcomes; lobbying also allows interest groups (and businesses in particular) to reduce political and regulatory uncertainty (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Drutman 2015; Franklin 2014).

When it comes to uncertainty, a majority of the uncertainty this chapter is concerned with is that which originates from the political sphere: uncertainty as it relates to politics and regulation. In the 1970s, businesses began getting involved in political advocacy to fight against “big” government and try to avoid increasing regulations (Drutman 2015; Waterhouse 2013). Now, corporate lobbying makes up the majority of lobbying in American politics (Drutman 2015), and increasing polarization is creating a new market for lobbyists who specialize in Republican advocacy or Democrat advocacy (Andres 2009, 110). Polarization, then, is one driver of political activity.

When we consider the effect that polarization has on lobbying, we might initially guess that it creates more certainty, in the form of gridlock. However, our political system is never in true gridlock; instead we see “punctuated equilibrium,” in which small, incremental change is punctuated by quite large changes to policy (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 2012). And during times of polarization, the preferences from the “winning side,” are very distant from the preferences of the “losing side”; compromise is considerably harder and less likely under polarized government (Lee 2009; Sinclair 2006b; Theriault 2013).

Under conditions where government is more polarized, and compromise is considerably more difficult, lobbying takes on a new importance. Lobbyists can, and do, act as go-betweens for Congressional offices. “Lobbyists fill the vacuum created by partisanship. Polarization has strengthened their hand in a process where information –

particularly intelligence about what is happening on the other side of the aisle – is a highly valuable commodity” (Andres 2009, 116). Andres’s point suggests that polarization leads to more access and influence for lobbyists under polarized conditions. The path dependent nature of relationships between members of Congress and lobbyists, in which lobbyists gain access through long-term provision of useful information (Hansen 1991), will become even more essential as polarization divides Congress. Polarization essentially creates a positive feedback loop: members of Congress and interest groups develop working relationships; the relationships between members of Congress become strained from partisan division; lobbying relationships fill the void, becoming ever more important.

This chapter extends the logic set forth here, and explains how Congressional polarization and constituency-based relationships between interest groups and members of Congress create expanded avenues for interest group influence over policy. Rather than laying out a specific set of hypotheses, this chapter will elaborate on the expectations and findings in Chapters 3 and 4, providing human-meaning and nuance to the statistical findings of these earlier chapters.

POLARIZATION AND CONSTITUENCY RELATIONSHIPS: THE DEEP CONNECTION

This section refreshes the arguments and expectations set forth in previous chapters. Polarization leads to a breakdown of relationships between members of Congress, and makes compromise on policy quite difficult (Lee 2009; Sinclair 2006b; Theriault 2013). There is also evidence that when there is electoral competition between the parties, policy uncertainty is increased and interest groups have more incentive to lobby (Gray et al. 2015). Given the highly competitive of federal elections in the US, and the extremely polarized nature of the parties, interest groups are facing a highly uncertain

political environment. If Democrats win majorities in the House and Senate, policy outcomes can be expected to be wildly different from if Republicans win majorities. Because interest groups lobby to reduce the political uncertainty they face, I expect that polarization will increase lobbying efforts in Congress.

If a desire to reduce uncertainty motivates interest groups to lobby, so should feelings of efficacy. Interest groups would certainly prefer to use their resources where they think these resources will be most valuable. When interest groups are able to speak for a member of Congress's constituency, this is, without a doubt, when that member of Congress will be most interested in their perspective (J. M. de Figueiredo and Silverman 2006; Hansen 1991; Mayhew 1974). Members of congress are single minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974), so providing them information about the concerns of their district is a sure-fire strategy for political access. Interest groups should be expected to know this and use this to their advantage. When an interest group speaks for a member's constituency, they will find themselves with more leverage to effect policy change in their preferred direction.

As polarization increases the amount of lobbying in Congress, and constituency-based relationships make some groups more effective at lobbying that venue, together they create a highly unequal playing-ground. Some groups will inevitably achieve more access to key members of Congress because of their ability to speak to that member's reelection prospects. Because of the path dependent nature of lobbying relationships (Drutman 2015; Hansen 1991), those groups who initially have something useful to offer will find themselves developing deeper and more influential relationships on the Hill over time. The degree to which these relationships are fruitful for interest groups in policy terms will depend, in part, on the kind of legislating Congress does. The closer an interest group's relationships with members on relevant committees, and the more specific the

legislation coming out of those committees, the more impact that group can expect to have. If, however, the committee writes loser legislation that allows for considerable regulatory interpretation, or if amendments are added on the Congressional floor at the last minute, an interest group might face unpleasant surprise.

Research on the relationship between bureaucracy and Congress suggests that in times of high polarization, Congress delegates much less to bureaucracy (Ethridge 2010). Polarization, then, strengthens the hand of interest groups who enjoy close relationships with members of Congress. Further, polarization results in tighter rules and more control over floor amendments, as the majority party tries to block minority party influence (Theriault 2013). Polarization then, unintentionally strengthens interest group influence over legislation by creating a narrower path to advocacy: advocacy must be effective at the committee level, or not at all, under highly polarized conditions. And the committee level is where well-connected interest groups enjoy the strongest relationships.

These expectations suggest that polarization has a positive-feedback effect on lobbying: polarization increases the incentive to lobby in order to reduce uncertainty. Lobbying in a polarized environment allows interest groups to have increased influence over legislators who no longer communicate across the aisle and who tightly control legislative outputs, allowing these groups to see better results from their lobbying efforts. Further, as groups lobby, their lobbyists are adept at showing positive results, and helping groups find more reasons to stay in the political advocacy game (Drutman 2015). While previous chapters support the notion that polarization increases the amount of lobbying in Congress, statistics cannot show *why* this phenomenon is occurring. Here I present the evidence from a series of interviews with lobbyists, journalists, and staffers, to show that polarization increases both the need to lobby, and the efficacy of lobbying – leading again to more lobbying.

DATA AND METHODS

The evidence in this chapter is based on a set of 17 interviews conducted with lobbyists, legislative staffers, and reporters. I interviewed five trade association lobbyists, four congressional staffers, three corporate lobbyists, two contract lobbyists, two journalists, and one formal coalition lobbyist. The purpose of these interviews was to establish how lobbyists say that they make strategic lobbying decisions, when they change strategies, and how their chosen strategies relate to their policy preferences and the political environment.

Interview subjects were first chosen randomly from a data set of all lobbyists who worked on the 2008 Farm Bill. Subjects were contacted with an interview request via a mailed letter, then via email or phone. Further subjects were determined using snowball sampling. At the end of each interview, the subject was asked if he or she knew anyone who might be willing to be interviewed on the subject, and those people were contacted. Additional subjects were those individuals who were key players during the 2008 Farm Bill, such as a senior legislative staffer for the then Chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee, and a senior minority staffer for the House Agriculture Committee.

All interviewees were asked a set of pre-determined, basic questions; however, the conversation was fairly free form and allowed interviewees to largely steer the conversation. Interviews were recorded with permission, and transcribed at a later date. All interviewees were allowed to determine whether or not their name would be used in association with their comments.

THE INTERVIEWS: POLITICAL CAPITAL, TRUST, AND POLARIZED POLITICS

I have argued that polarization is fundamentally changing the way interest groups lobby in Washington. And, while it is well established that partisanship is affecting floor

and procedural votes (Lee 2009; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008; Sinclair 2006b; Theriault 2008, 2013), partisanship is also finding its way into Congressional committees in unprecedented ways.

Agricultural committee staffers, and staff from member offices, often perceive themselves as fairly bipartisan, and even claim to be “one of the most bipartisan committees on the hill,” including doing joint meetings and working with committee members and staffers from across the aisle.²⁸ These staffers emphasize how difficult it is to pass a farm bill on a strict party line vote, particularly when neither party has a super majority in the Senate, and the importance of compromise to get legislation that both Republicans and Democrats find palatable.²⁹ One staffer noted that, “it’s not that partisan divisions are absent, you’ve got some strain,” but that there were still many members who were willing to compromise and whose constituency wanted strong farm bills.³⁰

However, interest groups do not perceive the climate similarly. Interest groups are acutely aware of the evolving partisan environment in Washington.

“When I first started in this business in the 1980s, the staff on the agriculture committees were professional staff. They provided analysis, and it wasn’t Democrat or Republican; they provided it to both sides. That would be unheard of today. Unheard of. Staff are as partisan as the members are.”³¹

Others noted that there is more “partisan warfare” in recent years.³² And particularly, that the partisan warfare made an already complex process nearly impossible

²⁸ Author interview with a staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, Washington DC, August 2014.

²⁹ Author interview with Mark Halverson, senior staffer for Tom Harkin, Washington DC, August 2014.

³⁰ Author interview with Mark Halverson, senior staffer for Senator Tom Harkin (D), Washington DC, August 2014.

³¹ Author interview with Chuck Conner, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Washington DC, August 2014.

³² Author interview with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014.

at times. One lobbyist told the following story of a legislative effort during the 2014 farm bill:

“We were trying to get something in the Senate. But the House would get mad at us because we were over in the Senate working on language and we were having to find compromise between the Republicans and Democrats to get it through. The [House] Republicans would... say “you need to be with us,” but we would still have [to compromise with] the Senate Democrats.”³³

In this quote and in other interviews, respondents emphasized that when trying to push for particular legislative outcome, negotiating between the institutional and cultural differences of the House and Senate is, alone, challenging. However, the current partisan climate is throwing an even bigger wrench into the process. Now, groups are not only torn between trying to get both chambers on board with their policy preferences, they are being asked to take partisan sides in a battle in which few of them have any interest. Indeed, lobbyists emphasized repeatedly that they preferred to be non-partisan, that their interest group was non-partisan, and that they preferred to work with both Republicans and Democrats on every issue in which they were involved.³⁴ Yet, increasingly these groups are being asked to take sides.

How do interest groups cope with this polarized environment? By ramping up their lobbying efforts and relying more heavily on coalitions. Almost every lobbyist or interest group interviewed emphasized the importance of coalitional work in today’s environment,³⁵ and many of these coalitions were “cross-cutting,” in the sense that they strove to align vastly different types of groups to work toward the same goals. One

³³ Author interview Michael Torrey, Torrey and Associates, Washington DC, July 2015.

³⁴ Author interview with a lobbyist for ConAgra, Washington DC, August 2014; and author interview with a lobbyist for a large agricultural producer association, July, 2015.

³⁵ Author interviews with Chandler Keys, Keys Group, Washington DC, July 2015; Barbra Hiden, American Beverage Association, Washington DC, August 2014; a lobbyist for a large agricultural producer association, Washington DC July, 2015; and Michael Torrey, Torrey and Associates, Washington DC, July 2015.

example was a coalition headed by the National Beverage Association, and composed of “those who advocate for the hungry, the food industry, and retailers.”³⁶

One committee staffer juxtaposed coalitions in the “old days” with the kinds of coalitions forming today on what they termed, “unholy lines.”³⁷ The staffer discussed these coalitions as “interesting to watch,” as “you’ve got tax payer groups on the right holding hands with environmental groups,” and so on.³⁸ Why are these “unholy” coalitions increasingly common? One lobbyist explained:

“What we’ve found... on addressing issues is that the days of the lone voice are over. So we manage or run more than one alliance or coalition. We’ve built these things – that’s become our specialty. Managing a coalition or managing a group of people is very difficult.”³⁹

When pressed on why coalitions were a preferable strategy for lobbying, he explained that a coalition or alliance gives groups “cover.” In other words, it protects groups from being pushed to align too strongly with one partisan side, and gives them a broader constituency in Congress and the committees.

Constituency-based relationships in Congress, in the current environment particularly, are key, and an interest group will be best served if they have a “more diverse membership.”⁴⁰ But regardless of how diverse or homogenous their membership was, nearly every interest group interviewed spoke about the importance of connecting

³⁶ Author interview with Barbra Hiden, American Beverage Association, Washington DC, August 2014.

³⁷ Author interview with a staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, Washington DC, August 2014.

³⁸ Author interview with a staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, Washington DC, August 2014.

³⁹ Author interview with a Michael Torrey, Torrey and Associates, Washington DC, July 2015.

⁴⁰ Author interview with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014.

their membership to members of Congress, as did journalists.⁴¹ One lobbyist put it succinctly:

“What really makes a difference in this town is not hearing from me or my boss, what really makes a difference in this town is when a member of Congress hears from farmers, or the people who sell equipment or inputs to those farmers, that’s what really makes a difference and that’s who we try to reach out to.”⁴²

The caveat to all of this is that members of Congress largely do not care about hearing from people who have nothing to do with their district or reelection prospects. In fact, a few lobbyists viewed contacting members with whom they didn’t have constituency-based relationships to simply be a waste: “I don’t lobby anybody on Capitol Hill unless we have an economic interest in their district... We pay attention to members of Congress where we have an economic interest. At least I do. And if you don’t, it’s just silly, you just have to.”⁴³ This sentiment strikes at the heart of why coalitions are so important for lobbying groups. Groups will not always have a constituency-based connection to all of the members of who they might need to influence, and as one lobbyist said, “the problem is, if you’re not here and you’re not being represented, just plan on getting whacked. Plan on something going wrong, plan on being surprised.”⁴⁴ Coalitions provide a broader source of connection and give groups that “cover.”

Interviews suggested that when a lobbying group has crosscutting, constituency-based coalitions they become infinitely more influential. Both interest groups and staffers recognized that groups were more effective when they worked together to speak on the

⁴¹ Author interviews with the following people: Barbra Hiden, American Beverage Association, Washington DC, August, 2014; Chuck Conner, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Washington DC, August 2014; Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014; a lobbyist with a large company in the food and beverage category, Washington DC, July 2015; a lobbyist for a large agricultural producer association, July, 2015; a food and agricultural journalist for a specialty publication; and Robbie Minnich, National Cotton Council, Washington DC, July 2015.

⁴² Author interview with a lobbyist for a large agricultural producer association, July, 2015.

⁴³ Author interview with Chandler Keys, Keys Group, Washington DC, July 2015.

⁴⁴ Author interview with Chandler Keys, Keys Group, Washington DC, July 2015.

behalf of voters.⁴⁵ Coalitions can move legislation forward when it is stalling, to push legislators (and even interest groups) to come to agreements. For instance, in 2014 a coalition of trade associations and producers helped move forward legislation on federal food labeling standards.⁴⁶ Another example of coalitional power in action was the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's (NSAC) efforts to restore wetlands through environmental legislation:

“One of our very first victories was the Wetland Reserve Program, this was in the 1980s. We did a farm tour, we got people who were not seeing eye-to-eye on a bus and we went farm to farm and looked at all these different wetlands, and the impact of these regulations and whatnot, and that was actually successful in and of itself... So we came back and we wrote the wetland reserve and got it introduced in Congress, and it became law in 1990... But it all came out of the fact that we had both sides of the fence, so to speak, on the same bus looking at the same wetlands, discussing regulations.”⁴⁷

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, in fact, has only become more adept at this type of tactic since the 1980s. What makes the NSCA so effective is that they use this broad constituency-based membership to overcome partisan divides. Mr. Ferd Hoefner, from the NSAC, explained,

“we want a bill introduced in the House and the Senate at the same time, and we want both bills to have both a Republican and a Democratic lead sponsor. And we preferably want them on the committee that's going to deal with it... And as you might imagine, it's increasingly difficult to find the right Democrat and the right Republican who actually want to do something together... But that would be our preference, most of the time, to have bipartisan lead sponsors and do it in the House and the Senate, if not simultaneously, at least in the same year.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Author interviews with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014; a Congressional staff member from a heavily agricultural district, Phone Interview, September 2015; a lobbyist from a large agribusiness company, Washington DC, July 2015; and Robbie Minnich, National Cotton Council, Washington DC, July 2015.

⁴⁶ Author interview with a lobbyist from a large agribusiness company, Washington DC, July 2015.

⁴⁷ Author interview with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014

⁴⁸ Author interview with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014

This persistence and dedicated strategy has paid off for NSAC. So much so, that in the halls of Congress they've become something of an insider joke: "we love them, [but] toward the end of the process we start to hate them because they're so persistent. So that's the joke, "oh that's a Ferd provision – do we have to keep this?"⁴⁹ Inevitably the answer is, "yes, NSAC provisions must be kept" according to the staffer, because they'll be back if the provision isn't kept! When asked at the end of interviews who else to interview, a surprisingly large number of respondents – both lobbyists and staffers alike – said to talk to Ferd Hoefner of the NSAC.

Ultimately, staffers, members of Congress, and committees are receptive to influence from groups like the NSAC because these groups speak on the behalf of constituency, and because they do a considerable amount of the negotiation and legwork that has become so difficult in Congress's partisan halls. Groups like NSAC were allowed, in 2008, to "go line by line through what [the committee] had drafted and add suggestions to that."⁵⁰ Interest groups who build a reputation for accuracy, credibility, and neutrality find that their access to members and staffers on both sides of the aisle expands dramatically, "trust goes a long way in this business. They may completely disagree with you, but they may trust that your information is accurate. They might disagree with us but they understand that we have thousands of farmer members who actually feel this way."⁵¹

Successful lobbying groups become adept at avoiding the appearance of partisan alliances, and at negotiating between members who often vehemently oppose one

⁴⁹ Author interview with a staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, Washington DC, August 2014.

⁵⁰ Author interview with a staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, Washington DC, August 2014.

⁵¹ Author interview with Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington DC, August 2014.

another, and above all, not giving up on members who appear intractable. One lobbyist explained that, “this is crazy business. You never know for sure where people are going to come from. I could cite you numerous examples where [you think], “wow, I can’t believe he did that.” So you never totally give up on anybody. It’s part of good transparency, good courtesy.”⁵² Developing a reputation as someone who doesn’t give up on an issue just because it’s challenging is just as key as representing a member’s constituents; “The thing that’s really important in this town is that the people you’re talking to know you aren’t going to rest... If every morning you’re going to get up and run this rabbit to the hole, they’re more apt to talk to you.”⁵³

In sum, interest groups and lobbyists who persistently provide accurate and reputable information, who speak for a voting-constituency, and who overcome partisan divisions are the most influential groups on the Hill. Partisanship and uncertainty have created a hostile environment for many groups, yet, those who are able to develop cross-cutting coalitions, speak for broad constituencies, and develop reputations as persistent non-partisan negotiators have found themselves flourishing.

CONCLUSIONS

The interviews discussed here and others, whose quotes did not end up in text, illustrate that partisanship, as predicted, has had a considerable impact on interest group lobbying. It has required groups to increase their legislative efforts and engage in more coalition building between themselves and with members of Congress, a difficult task. Constituency-based relationships with members of relevant committees are key for influence, as is the ability to bridge partisan divides between members.

⁵² Author interview with Chuck Conner, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Washington DC, August 2014.

⁵³ Author interview with Chandler Keys, Keys Group, Washington DC, July 2015.

These interviews suggest that partisanship, combined with electoral incentives, create a Congressional environment in which interest groups are allowed increasing influence over legislation, and where they play a large role in negotiating between members who once might have simply walked across the hall and spoken to each other. Interest groups who establish reputations as reliable, trustworthy, and factual reportedly gain more access to members of Congress and have better success at achieving their legislative priorities. But reputation takes considerable time and effort to build, and not all corporations or interest groups can afford to maintain a continual presence on the Hill (Lux, Crook, and Woehr 2011; Mathur and Singh 2011). This creates an uneven playing field even for groups who have yet to overcome the collective action barrier and intend to engage in political advocacy. One way that groups are able to overcome this barrier is coalition building.

Not only do coalitions help interest groups overcome the financial barriers to lobbying, they also allow interest groups to present a united front of consensus and support to members of Congress, and to help move legislation forward that might otherwise have stalled and failed. By formulating internal consensus between each other, and bridging traditional industry or party divisions, interest groups allow members of Congress to work across the aisle on issue that otherwise might have become overly partisan and resulted in gridlock.

The increasing importance of crosscutting coalition in the face of partisanship suggests an important avenue for future research. In particular, scholars should try to measure the relative effectiveness of differing kinds of coalitions in order to understand the role that they play in the legislative process, particularly under partisan conditions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation was to discover the lobbying strategies that interest groups adopt based on their own characteristics and in response to the changing political climate. I began with the premise that interest groups are rational actors who lobby in the manner that they believe will be the most effective for achieving their political goals. I found that interest group strategies depend on the financial capacity of the group and their relationship to members of Congress on relevant committees. I also found that interest groups are adapting to Congressional polarization by drastically increasing their lobbying efforts in that venue and scaling back in other venues.

The dissertation began by asserting the importance of food and agricultural policy as a area for study, both because of it's relevance to everyday American life, and because the subsystem is in a particular moment of flux – the agricultural policy landscape is beginning to shift in response to the polarization that has been gripping the rest of Congress since the 1990s.

Chapter 2 situated the dissertation in the larger body of literature on subsystems and lobbying. This chapter reviewed the social science on lobbying strategies, from venue shopping to informational subsidy theory. And, using these findings as a starting point, I theorized that interest groups would be constrained in their strategic options by their financial resources and by their ability to speak to members of Congress as representatives of a constituency. I also reviewed research on conflict expansion and polarization, and in doing so pushed the literature forward to hypothesize what polarization will mean for interest group lobbying behavior. I argued here that polarization would increase lobbying in Congress for two reasons: 1) polarization increases uncertainty, forcing interest groups to invest more money keeping abreast of

politics; and 2) polarization decreases the capacity of members of Congress to strike grand bargains and compromise with one another, creating new opportunity for interest groups to fill new roles as mediators between members, and thus increasing their influence over the policy process.

To test these theories, Chapter 3 looks at a subset of lobbying firms. In this chapter I build an original dataset, combining LDA reports with Compustat firm-level data and political variables, such as an average of the DW-NOMINATE scores for the House and Senate for each year. Using this dataset, I show that polarization is increasing lobbying in Congress for all firms, and for smaller firms it is causing corresponding decreases in agency lobbying. I also show that firm capacity, combined with constituency-based relationships to members of Congress cause a considerable shift in lobbying priorities for those firms whose revenue falls at or below the mean revenue in the dataset – those firms who fall at or below the mean revenue, and who have a relatively higher combination of both revenue and constituency-based relationships lobby Congress more heavily than those who do not have this combination. In other words, smaller firms are forced to be particularly strategic in their advocacy strategies, and all firms are responding to polarization with a considerable increase in their attention to Congress.

Chapter 4 tests the effect of polarization on a broader dataset, including all groups who reported lobbying in the agriculture sector between 1998 and 2013. This dataset, again, is constructed using LDA data combined, to which I add political variables. Chapter 4 confirms that across the board – among all lobbying groups, from corporations, to interest groups, to unions, to local governments – polarization drastically increases lobbying in Congress, and drives down agency lobbying. Interest groups, separated out from corporations, are particularly responsive to polarization in their venue selection.

Interest groups are far more inclined to lobby Congress as polarization increases, and less inclined to lobby the bureaucracy. This may be because many of these interest groups exist for the sole purpose of political advocacy, and are therefore even more attuned and responsive to political change.

Both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 show that the climate in Washington has a considerable impact on the strategies that interest groups use in their political advocacy. However, LDA data indicates only what interest groups are doing, and not why they are doing it. These chapters can only guess at the motivations behind increasing lobbying efforts in Congress and reducing lobbying of the bureaucracy.

In order to better understand the true effect that polarization is having on lobbying strategy, Chapter 5 uses a series of interviews to dig into the strategic decisions of groups lobbying on the 2008 farm bill and other food and agriculture legislation. This chapter highlights the importance of coalition forming under polarized conditions, and how these coalitions can be highly influential. Interviewees described acting as policy mediators and negotiators; in the process of forming a coalition, interest groups spent considerable time negotiating their preferred policy, so that the coalition could present a united front to Congressional committee members. In doing so, they essentially wrote policy before bringing it to members of Congress then presented the policy as a palatable solution to some perceived problem. By negotiating amongst themselves prior to lobbying Congress, coalitions were often able to make the polarized political process easier on lawmakers. A particularly diverse or crosscutting coalition made it easier for legislators to co-author with members of the opposite party and to support legislation that they might otherwise have been uncertain about.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation makes two primary methodological contributions to political science, and in doing so aims to substantively push the field forward in understanding lobbying and its effects on public policy.

First, this dissertation is the first to ask business literature on corporate lobbying, political science literatures on lobbying and subsystems, and the literature on polarization to speak to each other. As such, it combines the strengths of these literatures to move political science further toward a deep understanding of lobbying strategy. In isolating firms for study, I show that corporate characteristics constrain and enable distinct approaches toward political advocacy. Then, moving beyond firms, I show that all interest groups (including firms) are adapting their strategies to become more effective in a polarized environment.

Second, in order to offer new insight into what strategies interest groups are using to achieve their preferred political outcomes and how they are changing these strategies in response to the rapidly shifting political climate of Washington, I use a multi-method approach that is rare in the lobbying literature. I combine cross-sectional time series data with a series of interviews to flesh out our collective understanding of lobbying behavior. I find that by adjusting to polarization in Congress, lobbyists may be more powerful than ever before.

Together these contributions result in a substantive theoretical advancement of the field's understanding of lobbying strategy and interest group responsiveness. The findings of this dissertation suggest several avenues for future research.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation highlights several areas for additional exploration. Scholarly work often becomes segregated – scholarship on subsystems rarely converses with that

on Congressional polarization or on corporate lobbying. In putting these literatures in conversation with each other, this dissertation begins the process of understanding how a changing, polarizing political environment forces American interest groups to alter their strategies for political advocacy. I show clearly that corporations and interest groups are changing their strategies for political advocacy in response to polarization. However, while I assert that this is a result of subsystem breakdown occurring in response to polarization, I do not prove that polarization is, in fact, breaking down subsystems. Though the behavior of interest groups clearly indicates that subsystems are changing, the argument that they are breaking down bears further research to describe exactly how subsystems are altering in response to polarization.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation explores the importance and utility of coalitional advocacy. This chapter shows that interest groups and their lobbyists view coalitions as the most effective way to effect policy change and to overcome obstacles presented by Congressional polarization. The relative effectiveness of coalitional groups, as compared to single-group advocacy, bears further exploration. In particular, future research should consider the specific benefits of crosscutting coalition groups in overcoming legislative opposition. Are coalitional groups comprised of non-traditional allies (such as hunger advocates and the beverage industry; or farmers and environmentalists) more effective at overcoming opposition to their policy goals than other kinds of groups? The interviews in this dissertation suggest that they likely are.

These are just a few of the directions in which future research might move. This dissertation suggests that there is far more to learn about the internal mechanics of lobbying strategies and how interest groups adapt to a rapidly changing political world.

Appendix A: Code Book

“Firm” is any for profit company/organization

“Interest Group” covers all professional associations, producer associations, alliances, and other organizations

“Local government” includes local government offices and bureaus, and municipal utility districts and other public utilities

“Other,” a country; individual; or group that cannot be identified

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